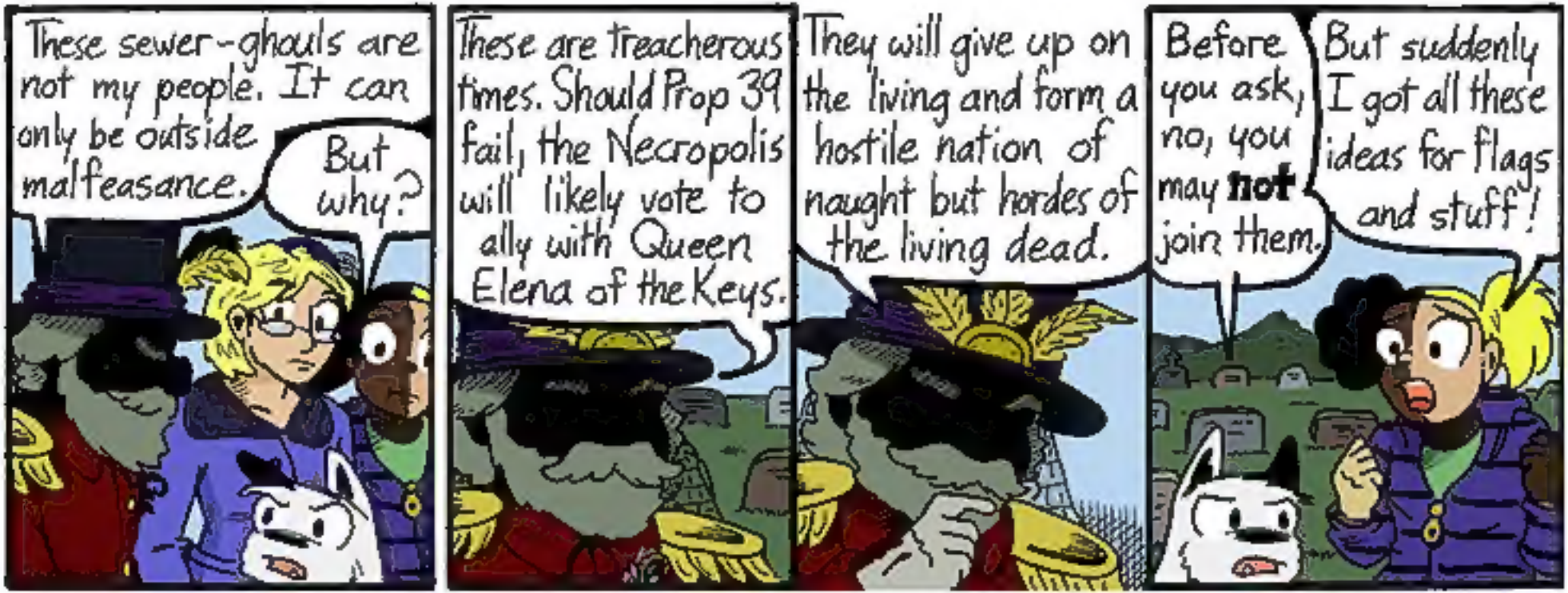
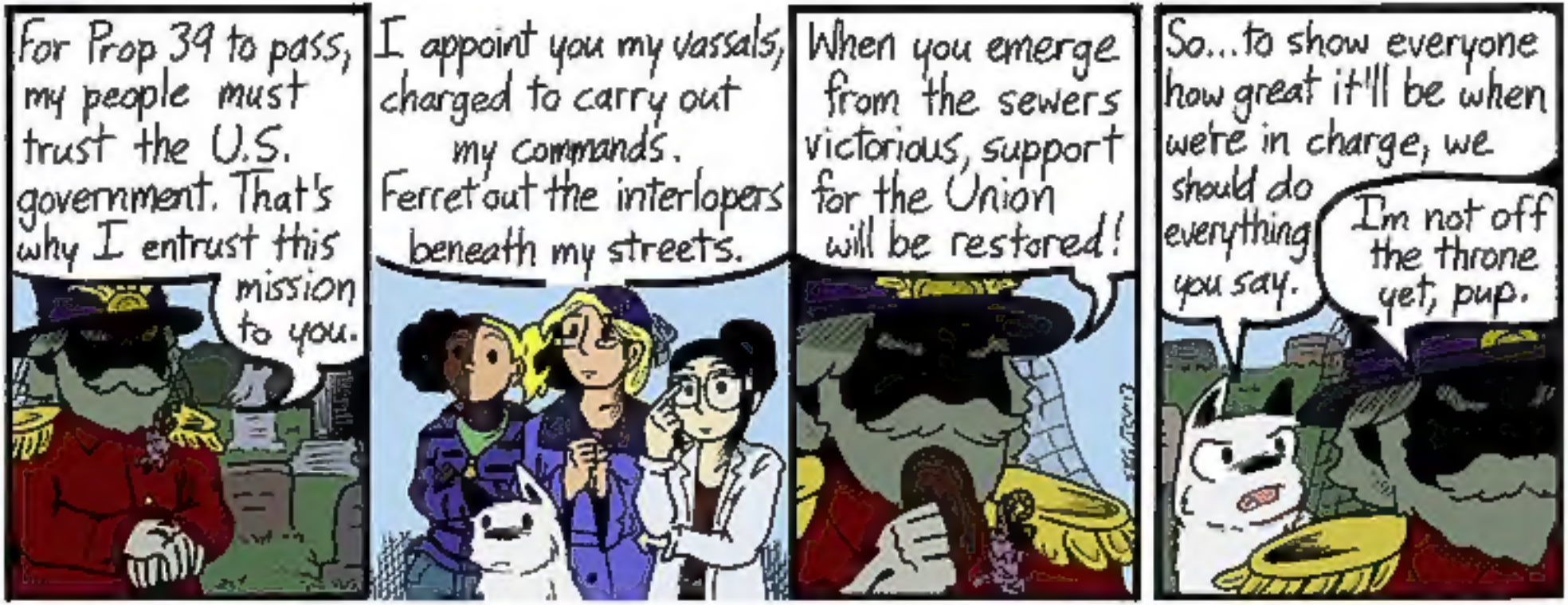

These sewer-ghouls are not my people. It can only be outside malfeasance.
But why?
These are treacherous times. Should Prop 39 fail, the Necropolis will likely vote to ally with Queen Elena of the Keys.
They will give up on the living and form a hostile nation of naught but hordes of the living dead.
Before you ask, no, you may **not** join them.
But suddenly I got all these ideas for flags and stuff!


For Prop 39 to pass, my people must trust the U.S. government. That's why I entrust this mission to you.
I appoint you my vassals, charged to carry out my commands. Ferret out the interlopers beneath my streets.
When you emerge victorious, support for the Union will be restored!
So...to show everyone how great it'll be when we're in charge, we should do everything you say.
I'm not off the throne yet, pup.

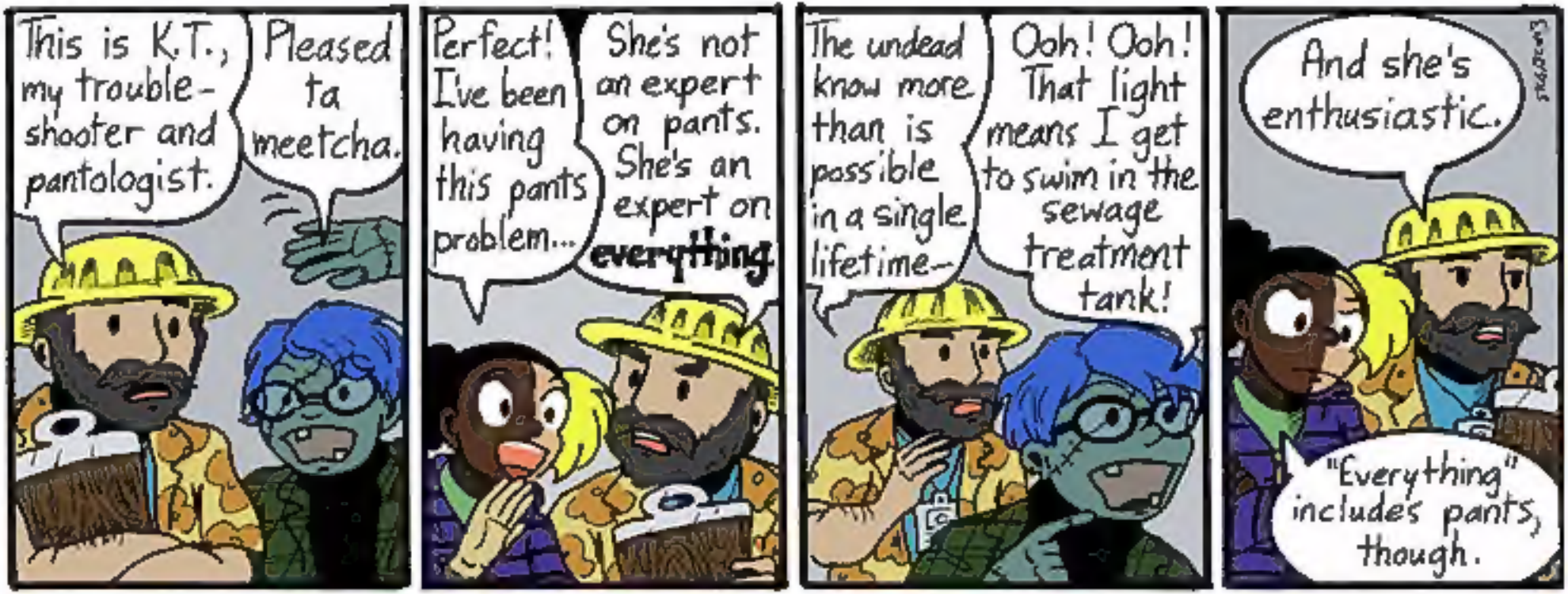

I called to say I'm sorry about what happened to your zombie friend.
Eaten by more zombies. This is why I try not to have a social life.
So... ahem... what have you been up to, Nick?
Y'know. Playing bridge, cruising around wine country... you?
Oh! I've been knighted by the Emperor and tomorrow we're hunting rogue undead.
How'd I draw the girly vacation and you got the macho one?
If it helps, I can mince around screaming.


This ain't gonna be dangerous, is it?
Don't worry. I'll have the field team with me.
Oh right. You're rooming with that shtumic Wilkin.
Are you still on that? I don't know what you think is going on—
Look, Virginia! I invited a cotillion of zombie drag queens up to watch "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?"
SLAM
Fine. It's an orgy.
You wouldn't do this to me if I weren't in this basket.
But you ahh, Blanche! You ahh in that basket!




I wanna stay at the hotel and crash Tip's slumber party.
Not on taxpayer time, you don't.
Tip hobnobs on my thin forbearance. He **says** he's trying to get information.
I hope we're doing something just as cool...
We are. It's called "duty."
How do you spell that again?
D-U-T-Y.
WATER AND WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLAN
Cuz it's a sewage plant—
I get it, thanks.


Mr. England? We were told to consult you about the sewer inspection?
Great. Talking dog. Tell me you're housebroken.
Watch it with the speciesism, Sewer Santa.
Hey, hey. Some of my best friends are nonhuman.
Director! Director! You gotta come see what I hacked up in the bioreactor!
Take me there!
I lied. It's some of my worst employees.
I think it's still moving!

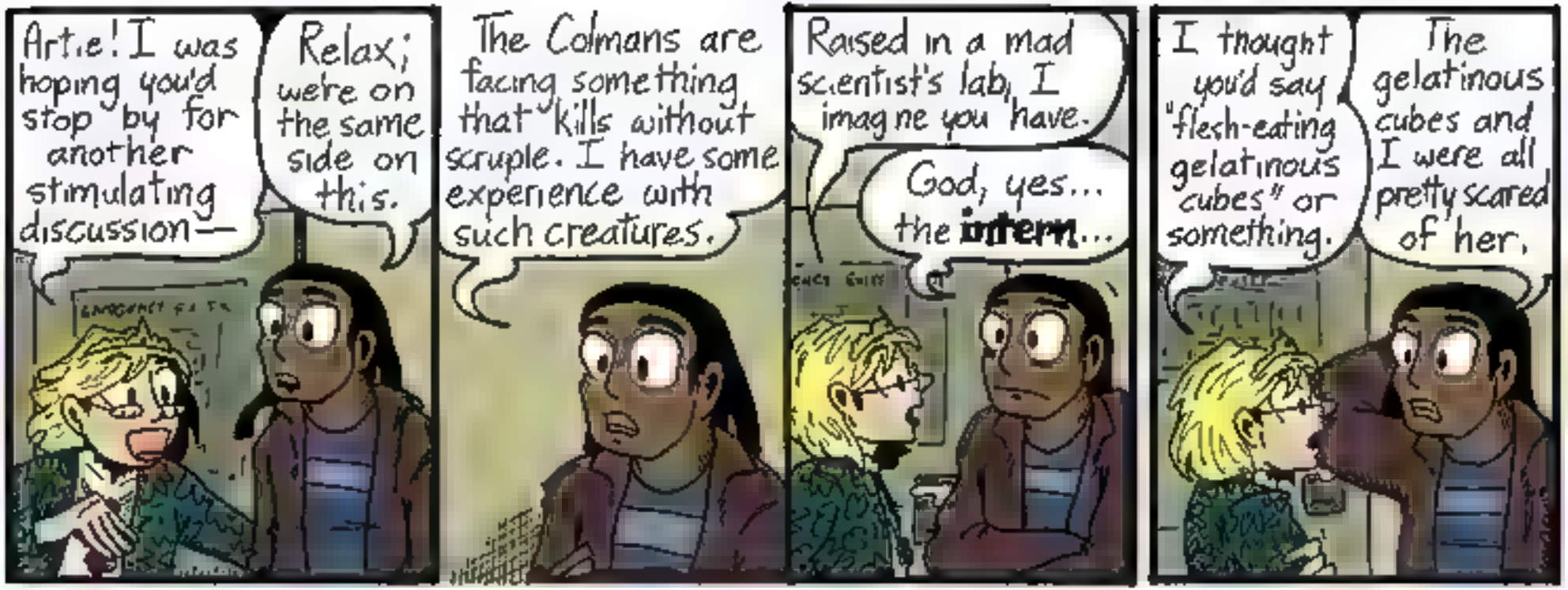

This is K.T., my trouble-shooter and pantologist.
Pleased ta meetcha.
Perfect! I've been having this pants problem...
She's not an expert on pants. She's an expert on everything
The undead know more than is possible in a single lifetime-
Ooh! Ooh! That light means I get to swim in the sewage treatment tank!
And she's enthusiastic.
"Everything" includes pants, though.


We do our best, but there's only so tight a ship two people can run.
I noticed the lack of uniforms.
This is California, fuzzy. The lack of uniform **is** our uniform.
But why did the city hire only two sewage workers?
Oh, we're supposed to have a staff of 38. HR can't keep pace with the zombie alligator attacks.
Babe! Have we finally found a job that sucks worse than ours?
Between that and mopping up rage virus, uniforms are low priority.

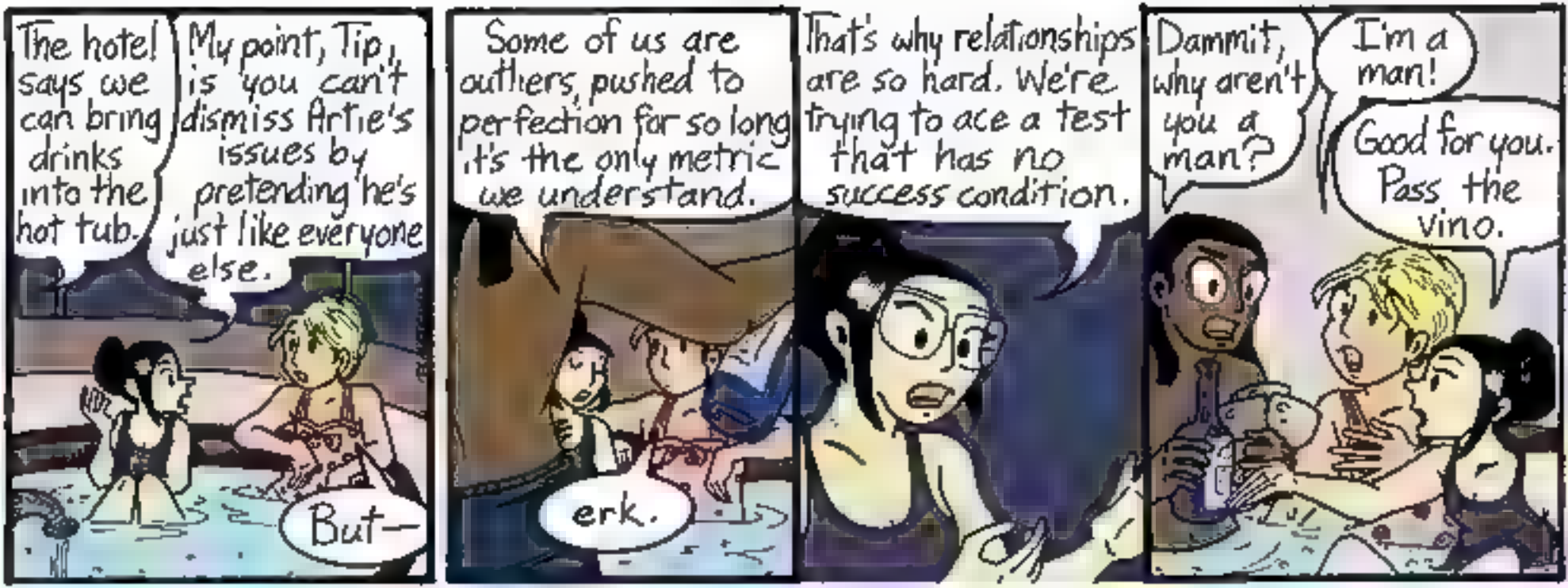

Looks like you've got a staff of two.
Nah, we're just the only ones who aren't wimps.
Unity and I have the intestinal fortitude to handle trouble.
Everything's trouble down here. Gators, snakes, frogs...
F-frogs?
Big hopping things, size of your head. All over the place.
It was pretty cool how you jumped right on Director England's head.
I do not look forward to writing this incident report.

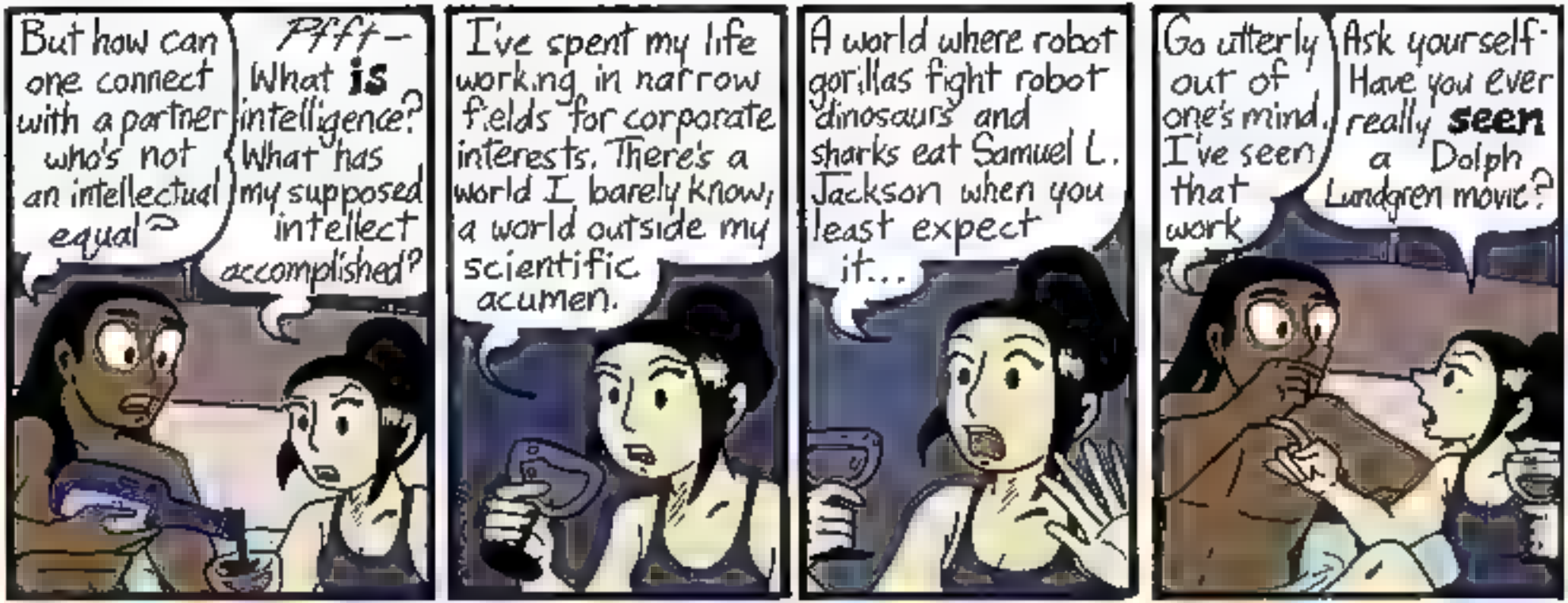

Hey, where're you going?
Change of plans Babe wants to send in our dude and scientist instead.
Aww. You're leaving already?
Nah, but I'm free. You up for a little dead-girl time?
Oh **hecka** yeah!
We can sever each others' feet and do our toenails!
Should I change out of this poo-drenched wetsuit?
Meh, I'm easy.

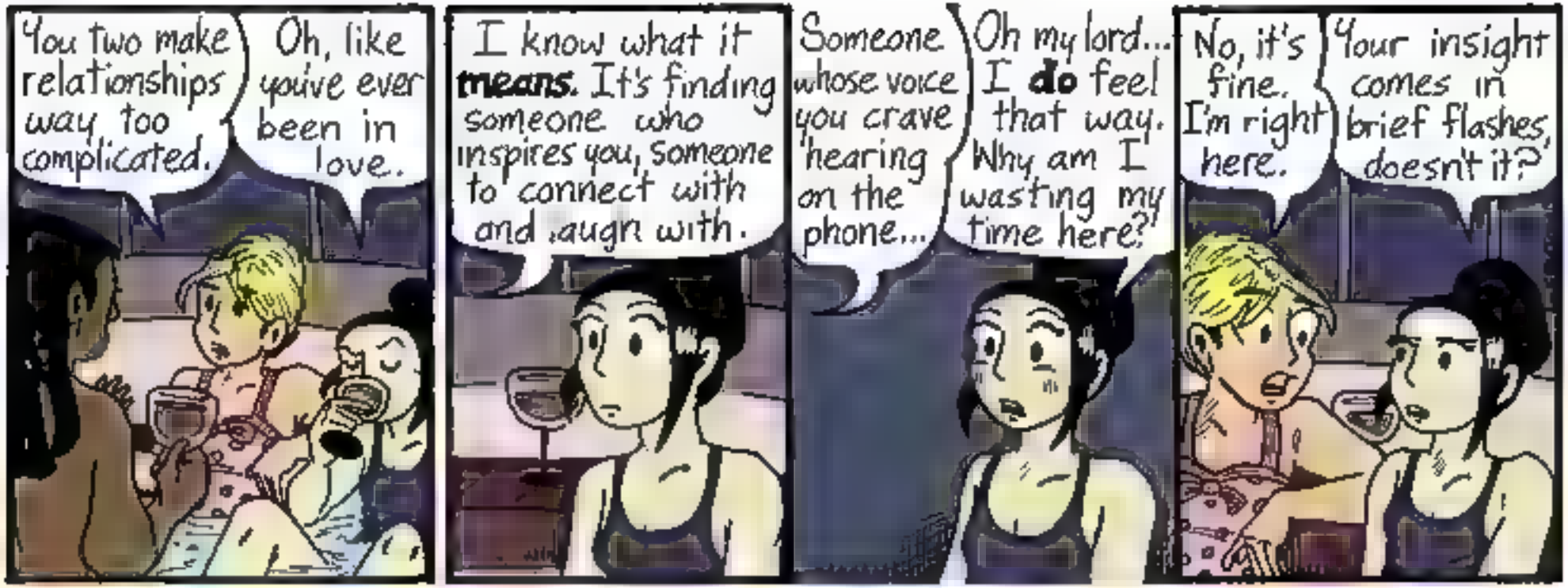

Forget about Dr Lee. Your ex can't be trusted.
We don't know the brain of a genius works.
Big deal! This is Earth, country, world & that's my country! I am in total control here
And that's none of your business.
Oh you did. Your brain is not a bird.
Shhh
SPLIP
Should
Careless kid. Don't do it. I have plans for you.
You don't say.
Waste of energy. Use for more useful purposes, like to end world war by ripping me.
Shame on you.
When I said you were wrong used
Oh. You're not the brave person I
I can't tell you how upset I am to have two attempt murder by the with traitors
Okay. This will work. Keep calm and proceed.
I thank goodness I should take disinfomation
No, it's actually a zombie attack
Run for your lives!
ZOMBIE ATTACK
Dude wolly. It's over this. Feed your own ego.
Are you all right? I don't know what you're talk is going on over here
Look, [illegible] a collection of zombie [illegible] seems to with [illegible] depend to [illegible]
Okay, fine. It's all right.
Hey, [illegible] you're all right
Ey! We all [illegible] You are in your [illegible]


Artie! I was hoping you'd stop by for another stimulating discussion—
Relax; we're on the same side on this.
The Colmans are facing something that kills without scruple. I have some experience with such creatures.
Raised in a mad scientist's lab, I imagine you have.
God, yes... the intern...
I thought you'd say "flesh-eating gelatinous cubes" or something.
The gelatinous cubes and I were all pretty scared of her.


Tip, how long will our room be occupied by drunk zombies in drag?
Er... "all night" was the general plan.
Oh, hello, Artie. Is he keeping you up too?
No, I was explaining how my terrifying origins left me emotionally stunted.
Oh please. You can't have been more isolated than I.
I once made some friends, but they were fried by a space laser.
You didn't have violin lessons on top of that.
I made them from stolen intelligence serum!
Let's find more wine.

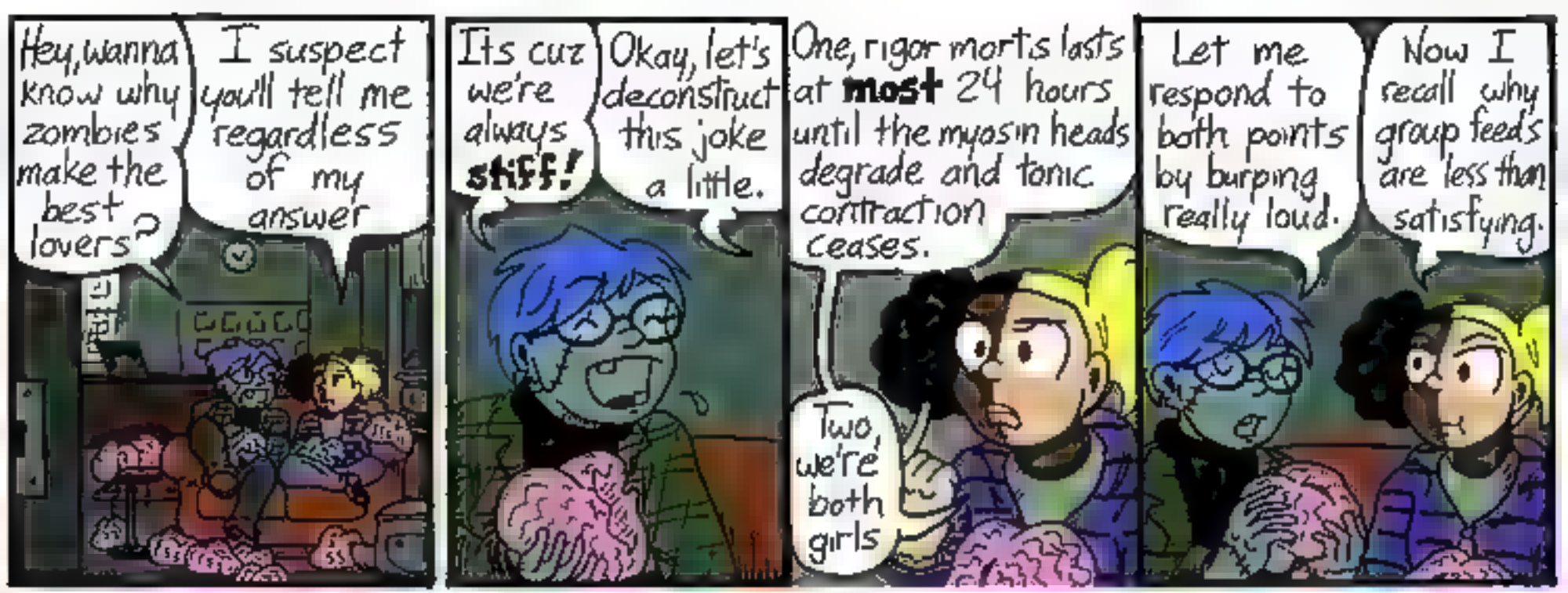

The hotel says we can bring drinks into the hot tub.
My point, Tip, is you can't dismiss Artie's issues by pretending he's just like everyone else.
But—
Some of us are outliers, pushed to perfection for so long it's the only metric we understand.
erk.
That's why relationships are so hard. We're trying to ace a test that has no success condition.
Dammit, why aren't you a man?
I'm a man!
Good for you. Pass the vino.

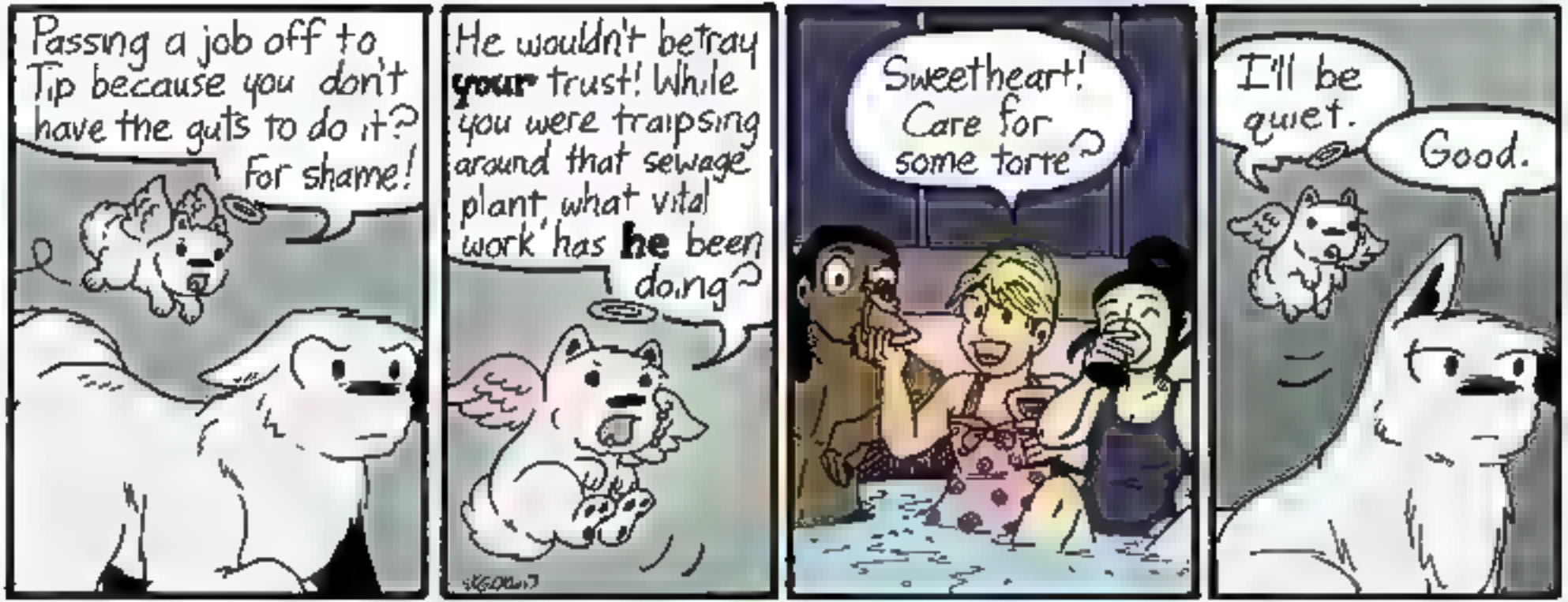

But how can one connect with a partner who's not an intellectual equal?
Pfft— What is intelligence? What has my supposed intellect accomplished?
I've spent my life working in narrow fields for corporate interests. There's a world I barely know, a world outside my scientific acumen.
A world where robot gorillas fight robot dinosaurs and sharks eat Samuel L. Jackson when you least expect it...
Go utterly out of one's mind. I've seen that work
Ask yourself: Have you ever really seen a Dolph Lundgren movie?

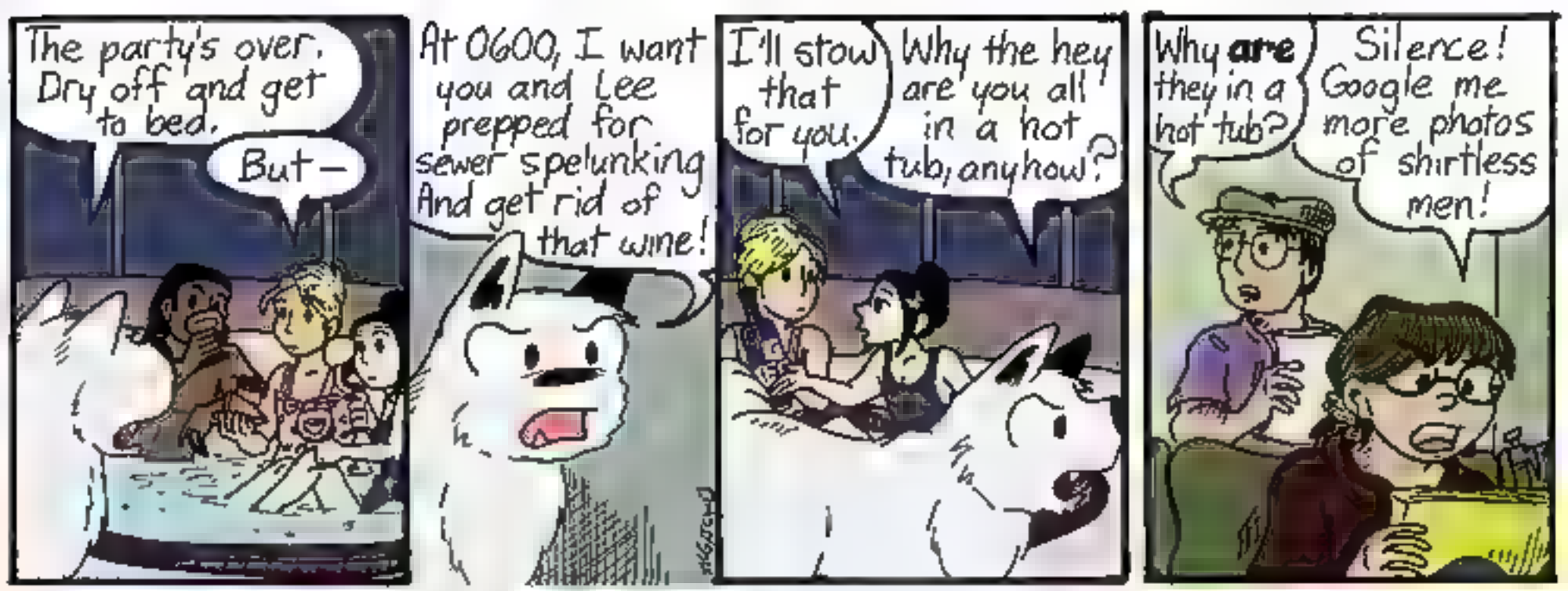

You two make relationships way too complicated.
Oh, like you've ever been in love.
I know what it **means**. It's finding someone who inspires you, someone to connect with and laugh with.
Someone whose voice you crave hearing on the phone...
Oh my lord... I **do** feel that way. Why am I wasting my time here?
No, it's fine. I'm right here.
Your insight comes in brief flashes, doesn't it?


Hey! You're with the Feds, right? Wanna hit up you guys's brain machine?
I dunno... I'd have to ask babe...
What is she, your con-science?
If that's the thing that nags you and stops you doing stuff, yeah.
Think for yourself! What could go wrong?
It's just when I eat brains I get... smart.
That's okay! I get dumb and torpid, so it'll balance out!
I can't argue with logic that gets me what I want!

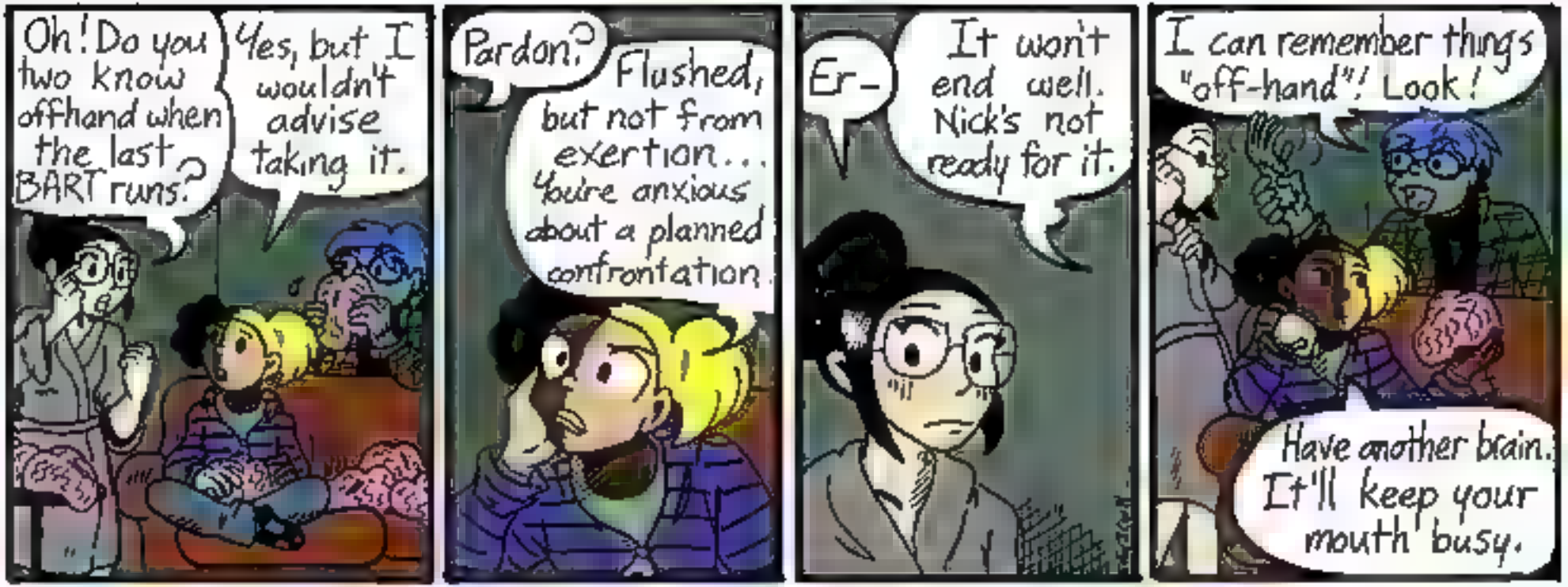



Hey, wanna know why zombies make the best lovers?
I suspect you'll tell me regardless of my answer
Its cuz we're always stiff!
Okay, let's deconstruct this joke a little.
One, rigor mortis lasts at most 24 hours until the myosin heads degrade and tonic contraction ceases.
Two, we're both girls
Let me respond to both points by burping really loud.
Now I recall why group feeds are less than satisfying.

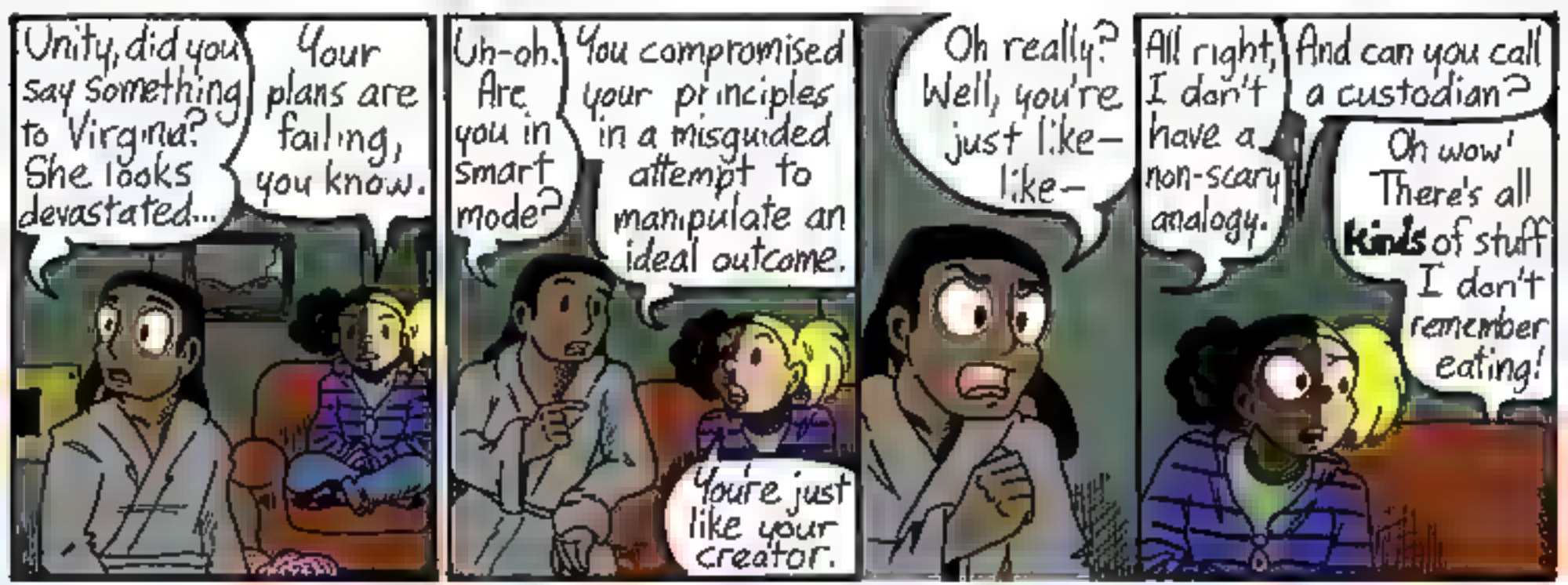

Passing a job off to Tip because you don't have the guts to do it? For shame!
He wouldn't betray your trust! While you were traipsing around that sewage plant, what vital work has he been doing?
Sweetheart! Care for some torte?
I'll be quiet.
Good.

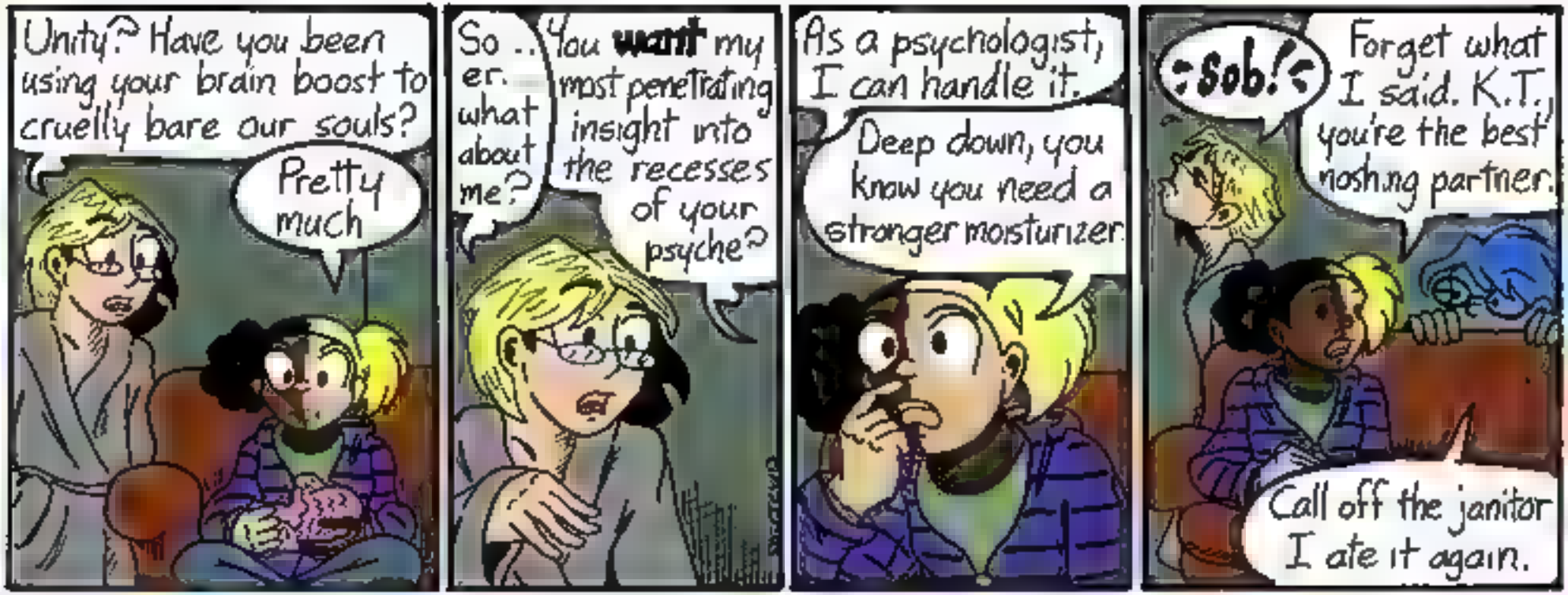

The party's over. Dry off and get to bed.
But—
At 0600, I want you and Lee prepped for sewer spelunking And get rid of that wine!
I'll stow that for you.
Why the hey are you all in a hot tub, anyhow?
Why are they in a hot tub?
Silence! Google me more photos of shirtless men!

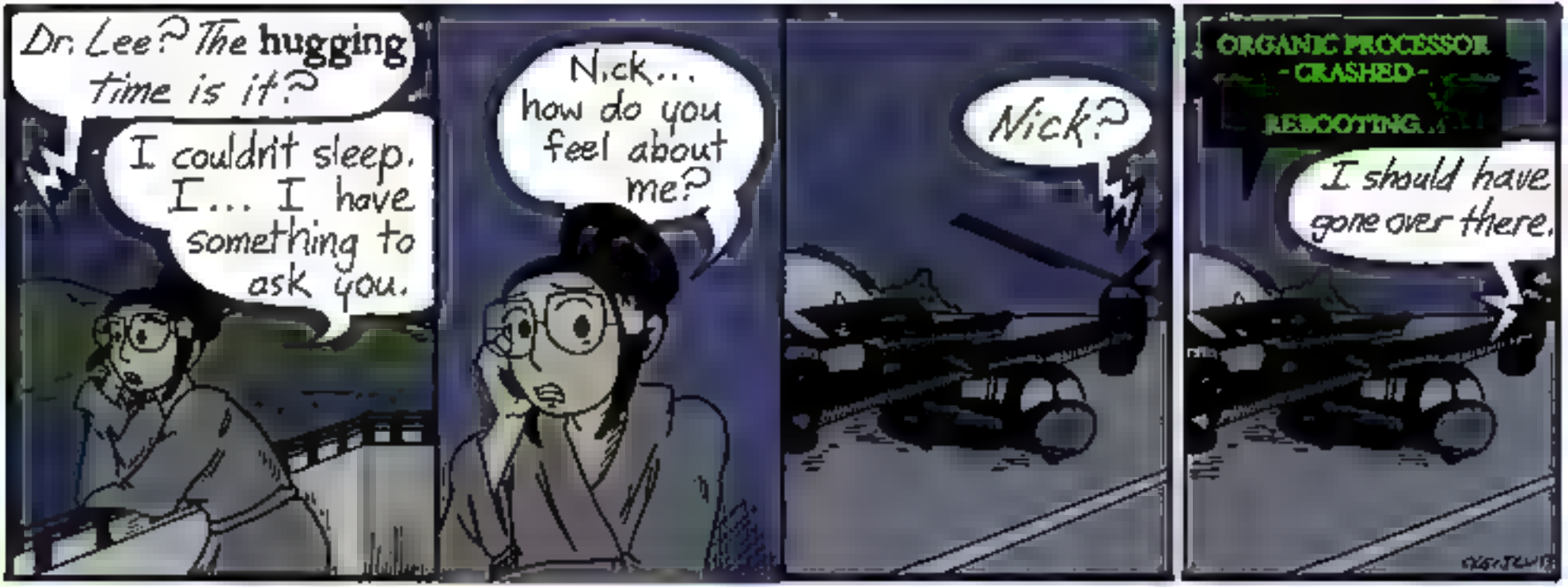

Unity! Did you raid the brain dispenser?
Yes, and that worries you, doesn't it?
You're threatened when I'm more intelligent than you. What secrets, I wonder, do you think you're hiding?
I... I'd better go ...
Calm down. I'll forget this, and Tip won't realize you fobbed the sewer job off on him until it's much too late.
Hm. I may have eaten overly blunt brains.
Ooh! Ooh! Do me next!

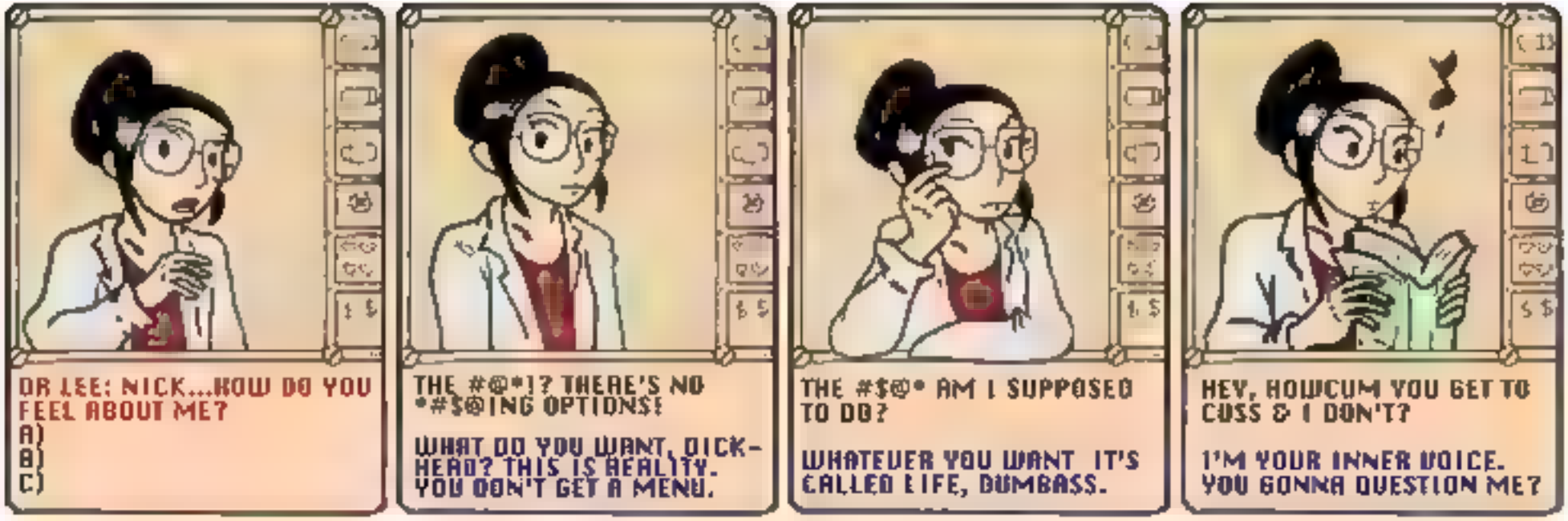

Oh! Do you two know offhand when the last BART runs?
Yes, but I wouldn't advise taking it.
Pardon?
Flushed, but not from exertion... You're anxious about a planned confrontation.
Er-
It won't end well. Nick's not ready for it.
I can remember things "off-hand"! Look!
Have another brain. It'll keep your mouth busy.

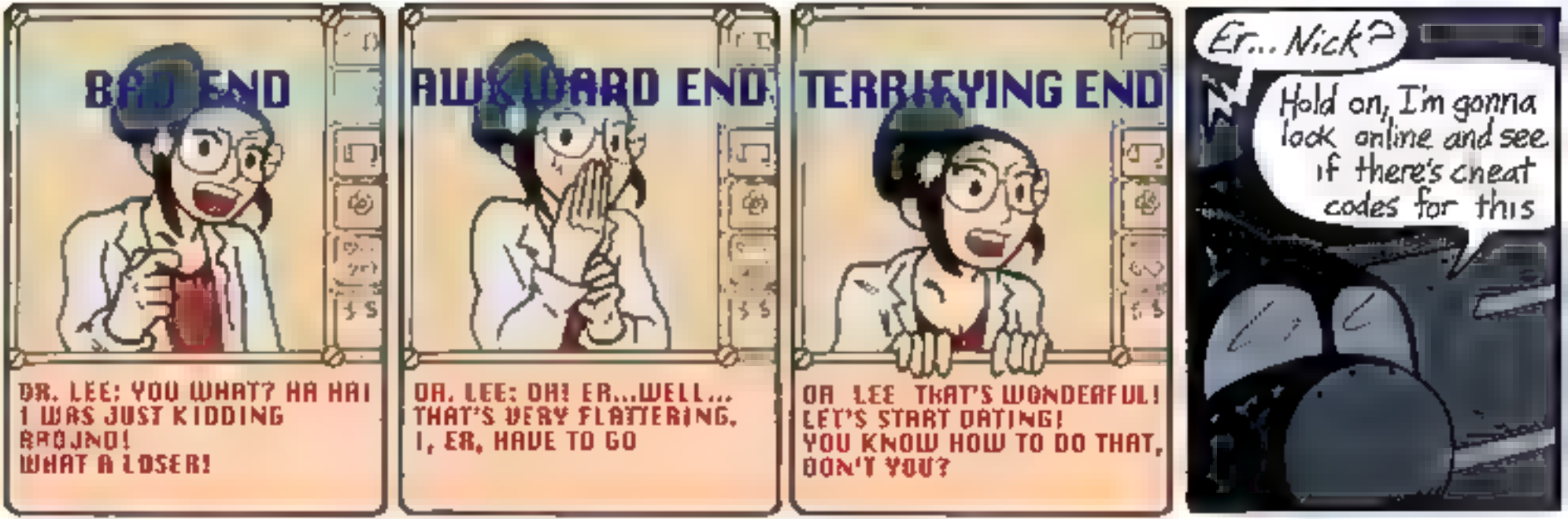

Unity... what are you saying?
Only that you consistently evince a remarkable inability to think of the consequences of your actions.
It's poetic justice, really... you rendered Nick incapable of providing whatever it is you now want from him.
What can you two be to each other?
N- never mind! I'll just go to bed!
Eh. You'll break down and call him, and meanwhile my friend here will vomit several pounds of brain matter
HURRRR
Stochastic skills batting a thousand.

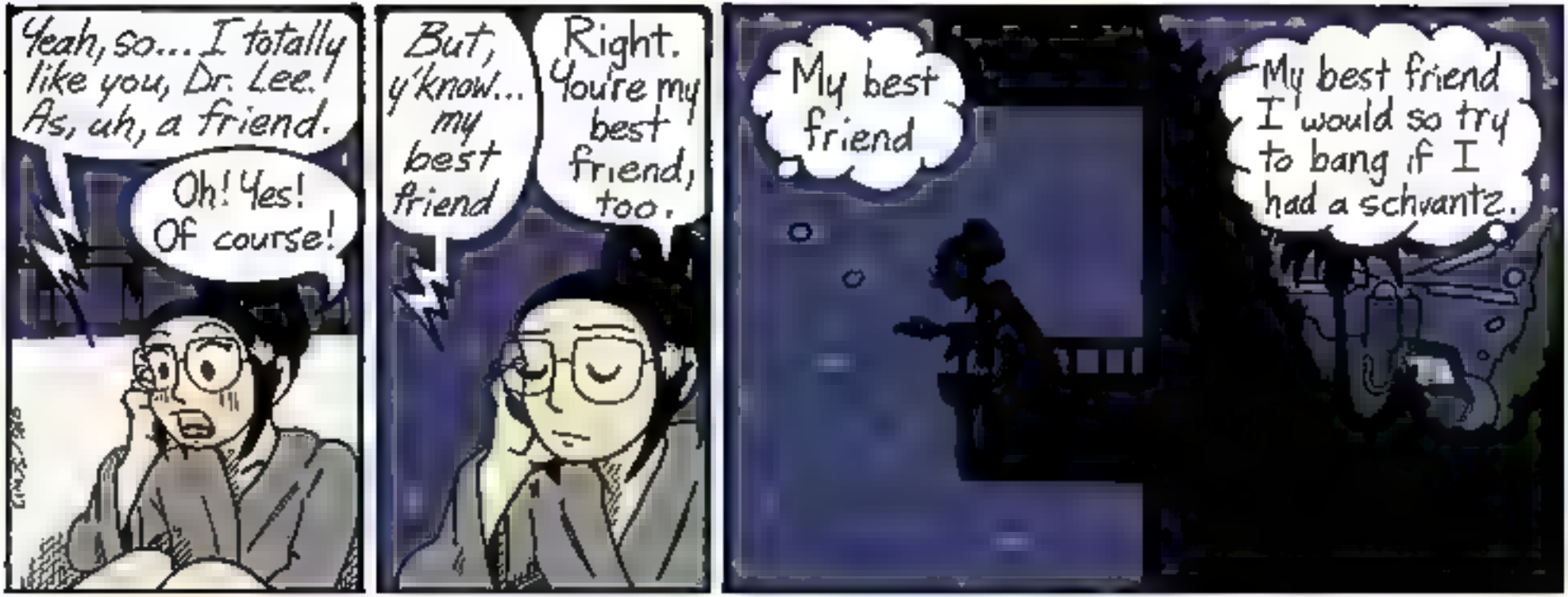

Unity, did you say something to Virginia? She looks devastated...
Your plans are failing, you know.
Uh-oh. Are you in smart mode?
You compromised your principles in a misguided attempt to manipulate an ideal outcome.
You're just like your creator.
Oh really? Well, you're just like— like—
All right, I don't have a non-scary analogy.
And can you call a custodian?
Oh wow! There's all kinds of stuff I don't remember eating!


Unity? Have you been using your brain boost to cruelly bare our souls?
Pretty much
So .. er. what about me?
You want my most penetrating insight into the recesses of your psyche?
As a psychologist, I can handle it.
Deep down, you know you need a stronger moisturizer.
:Sob!:
Forget what I said. K.T., you're the best noshing partner.
Call off the janitor I ate it again.


Dr. Lee? The hugging time is it?
I couldn't sleep. I... I have something to ask you.
Nick... how do you feel about me?
Nick?
ORGANIC PROCESSOR - CRASHED -
REBOOTING...
I should have gone over there.


DR LEE: NICK...HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT ME?
A)
B)
C)
THE #@*!? THERE'S NO *#$@ING OPTIONS!
WHAT DO YOU WANT, DICK-HEAD? THIS IS REALITY. YOU DON'T GET A MENU.
THE #$@* AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?
WHATEVER YOU WANT. IT'S CALLED LIFE, DUMBASS.
HEY, HOWCUM YOU GET TO CUSS & I DON'T?
I'M YOUR INNER VOICE. YOU GONNA QUESTION ME?


BAD END
DR. LEE: YOU WHAT? HA HA! I WAS JUST KIDDING BABJNO! WHAT A LOSER!
AWKWARD END
DR. LEE: OH! ER...WELL... THAT'S VERY FLATTERING. I, ER, HAVE TO GO
TERRIFYING END
DR LEE THAT'S WONDERFUL! LET'S START DATING! YOU KNOW HOW TO DO THAT, DON'T YOU?
Er... Nick?
Hold on, I'm gonna look online and see if there's cheat codes for this

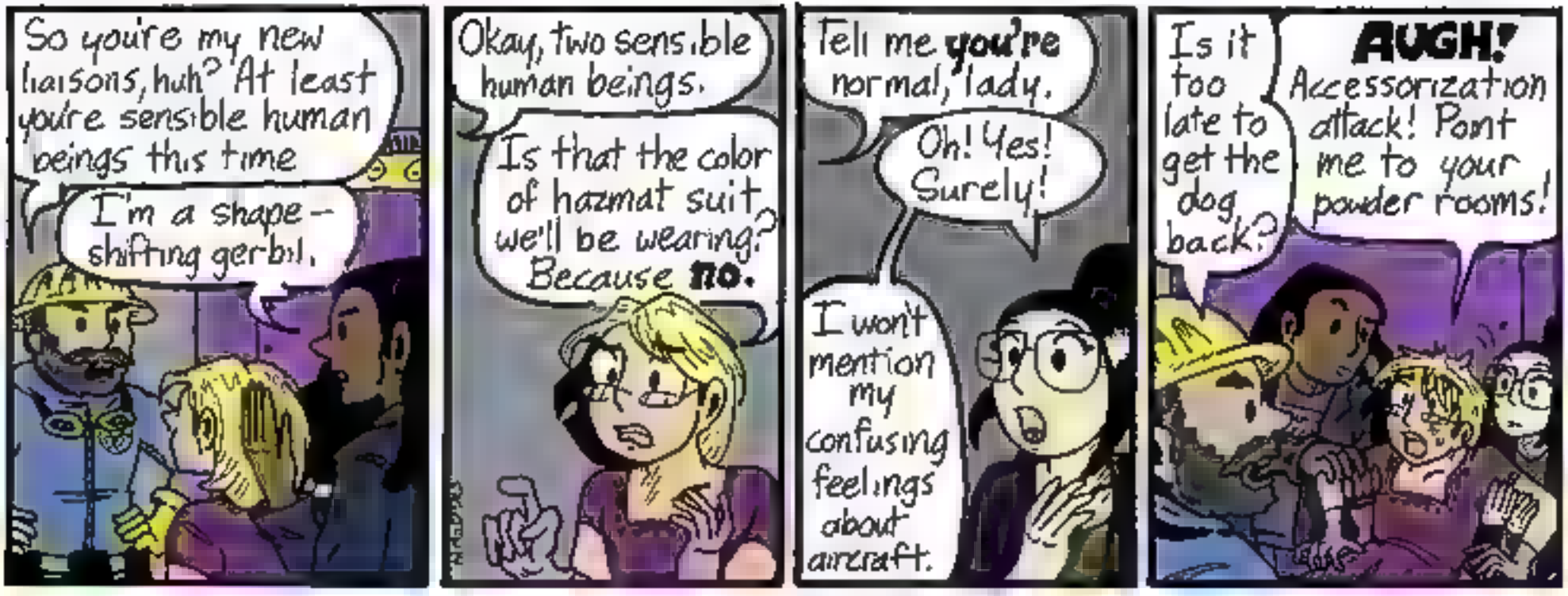

Yeah, so... I totally like you, Dr. Lee. As, uh, a friend.
Oh! Yes! Of course!
But, y'know... my best friend
Right. You're my best friend, too.
My best friend
My best friend I would so try to bang if I had a schvantz.

wood, trees



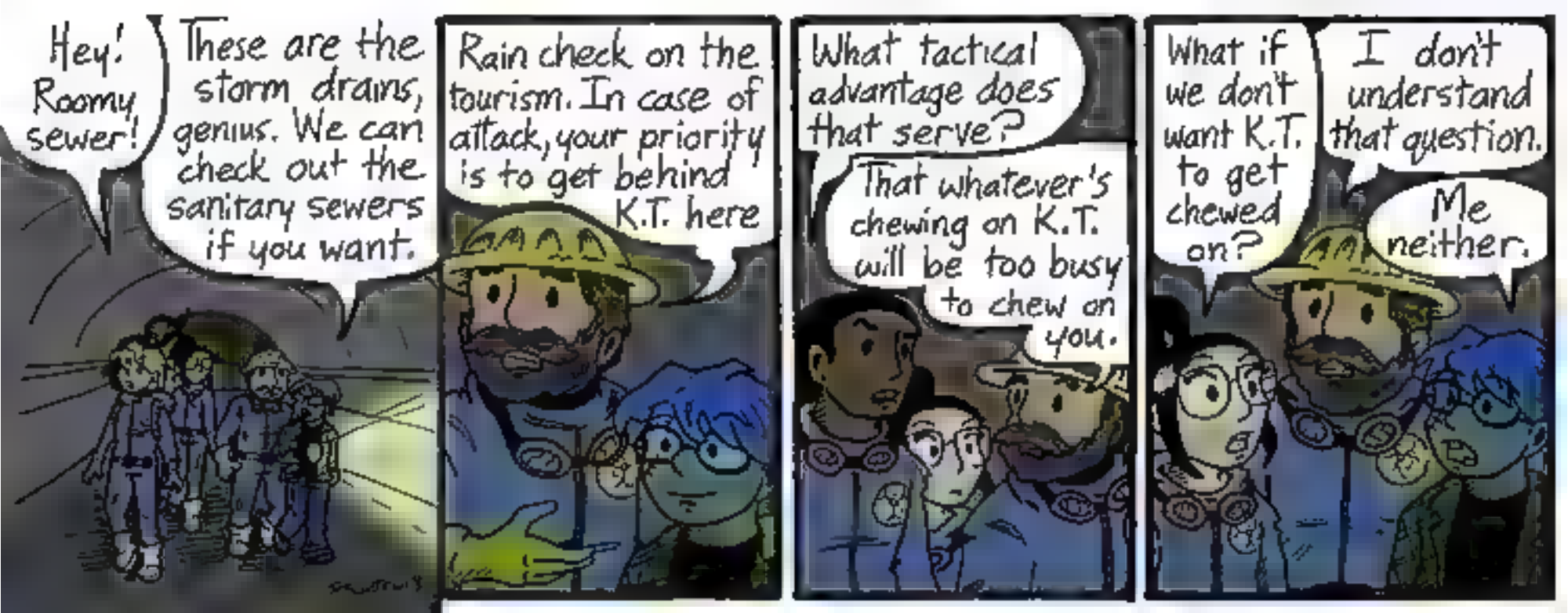

Babe? You up already? Where is everybody?
Ugh... I don't remember a thing from last night. Better get some chow...
Aw man... I got smart, didn't I?
C'mere. We have penetrating insights into where you can stick this bagel.

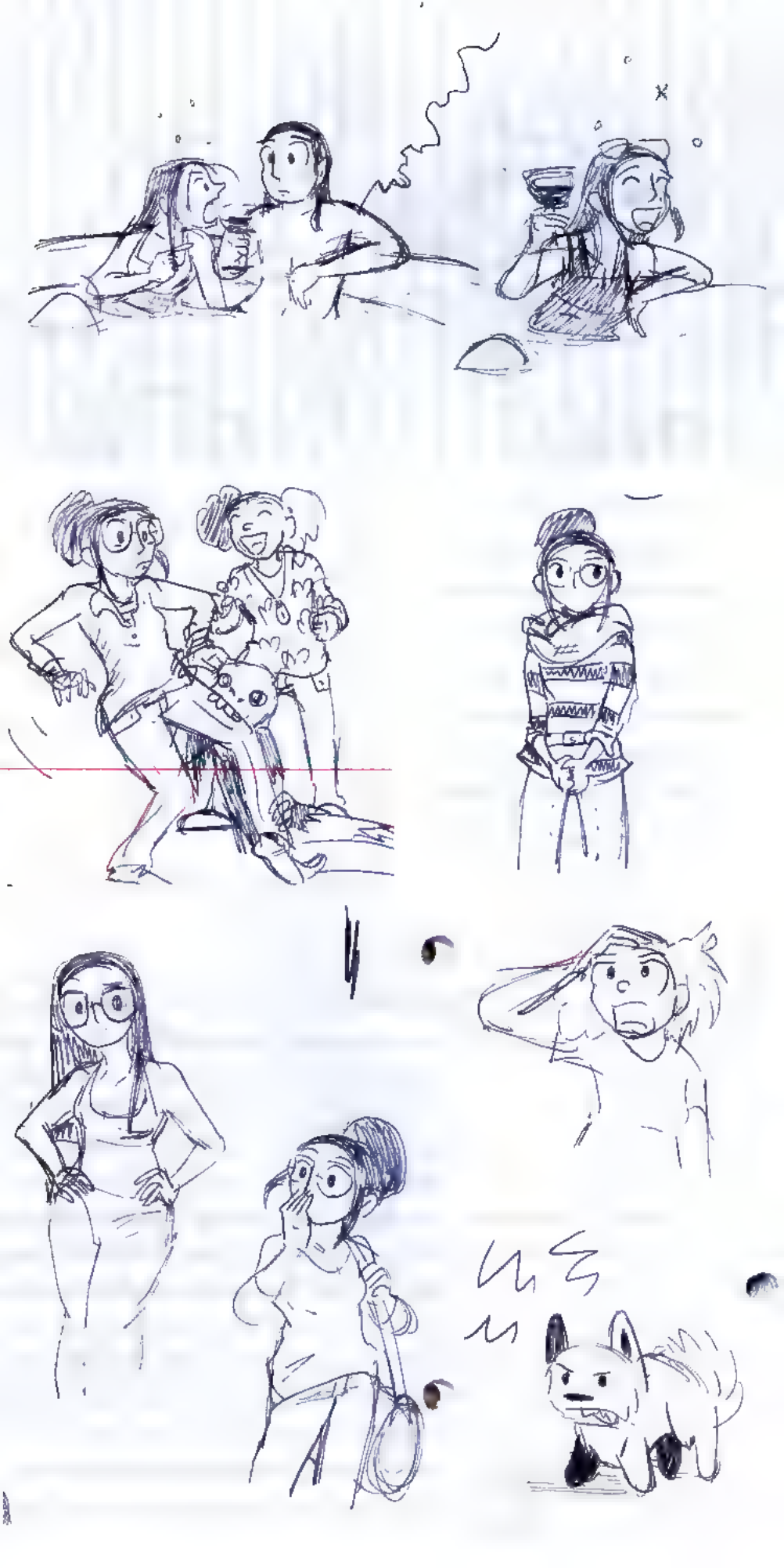

We need to be at our best today and not get distracted by things **somebody** may have said last night.
forry.
WE BELONG
Tp, get to the sewage plant and throw yourself into zombie-infested wastewater
Lee, provide backup and throw yourself into zombie-infested wastewater. Artie, we could use your experience in—
Zombies, wastewater, self-throwing. Right.
What's **your** plan for today?
Telling folks to throw themselves into zombie-infested wastewater. Why?


So you're my new liaisons, huh? At least you're sensible human beings this time
I'm a shape-shifting gerbil.
Okay, two sensible human beings.
Is that the color of hazmat suit we'll be wearing? Because no.
Tell me you're normal, lady.
Oh! Yes! Surely!
I won't mention my confusing feelings about aircraft.
Is it too late to get the dog back?
AUGH! Accessorization attack! Point me to your powder rooms!


So, Virginia, how far along are you on the Cure?
What?
Anasigma has you reverse-engineering the work of mad geniuses, yes? And one of your specialties is neuroscience.
I can think of one reason someone with those credentials would know my creator's name.
And you chose now to spring that on me?
Well, Tip's taking forever in the restroom.
I know! What does he do in there?

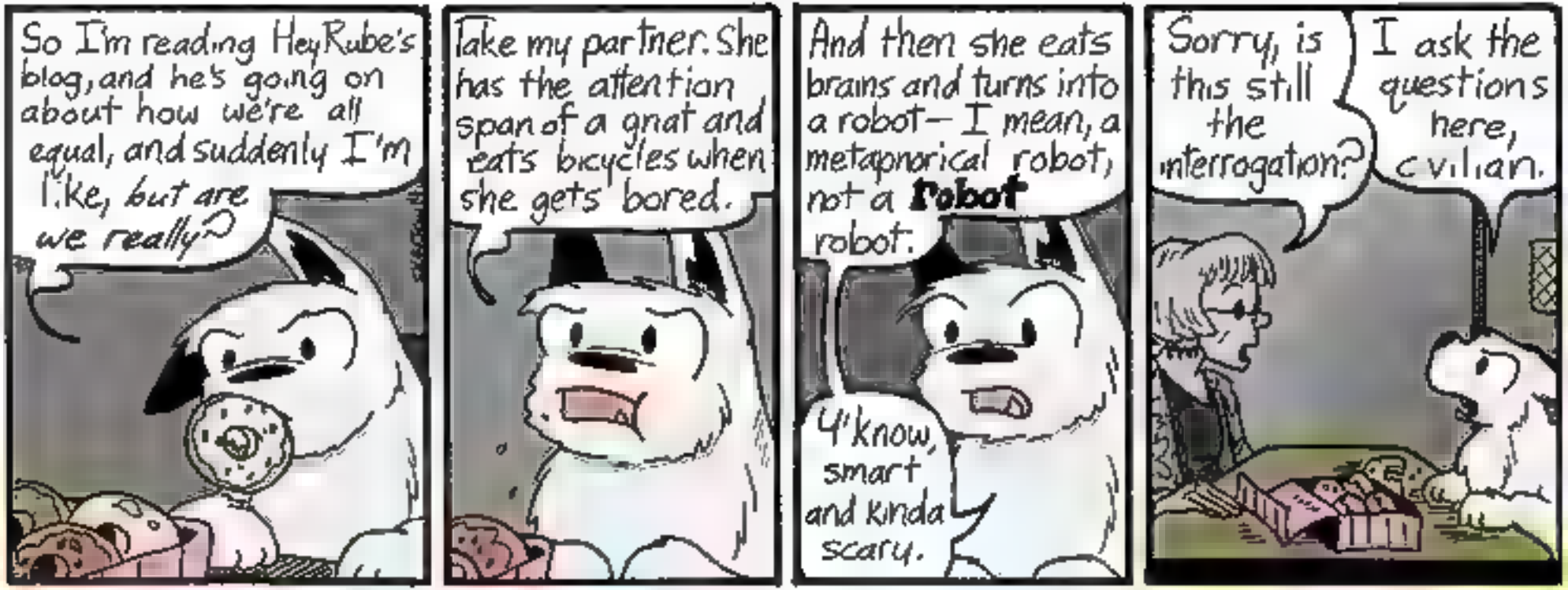

I'm asking you. Stop your research before it causes real damage.
This isn't like the other A-Sig projects! This is benevolent!
You're not stupid, Virginia. Far from it. You know how the Cure could be used.
And you wouldn't drop all those hints if you didn't, on some level, want me to—
LOOK! NEW HAT!
On the other hand, we all do stupid things sometimes.
So to speak.
Let's go fight some zombies!


Hey! Roomy sewer!
These are the storm drains, genius. We can check out the sanitary sewers if you want.
Rain check on the tourism. In case of attack, your priority is to get behind K.T. here
What tactical advantage does that serve?
That whatever's chewing on K.T. will be too busy to chew on you.
What if we don't want K.T. to get chewed on?
I don't understand that question.
Me neither.

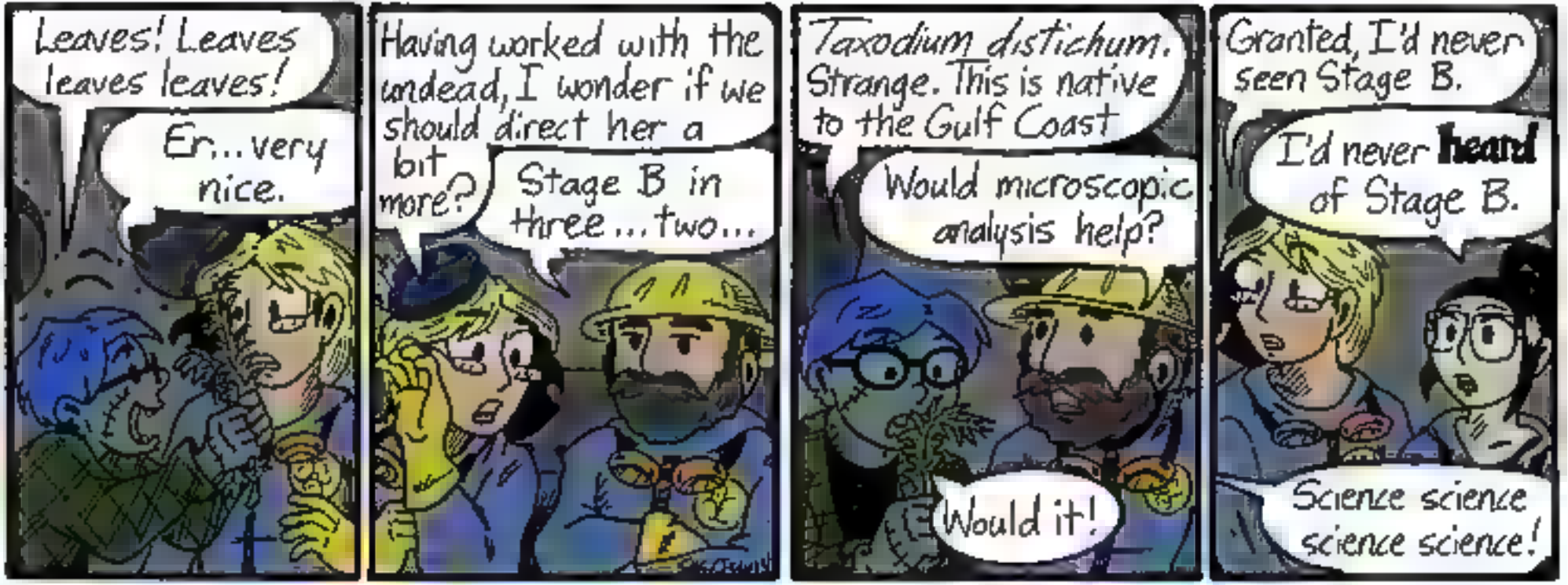



Thanks for joining us on the descent. This could get ugly.
Understood. I can't imagine this is how anyone wants to spend today-
Yes! Exactly what I need! A new adventure! A fresh start!
Breathe deeply! You know what that smell is?
Unmentionable.
FREEDOM!


I wish we had Sweetheart and Unity along.
Well.. K.T. is filling in well enough.
Ooh! I found leaves!
Sweetheart has tracking skills, she can keep a team on task...
I can't deny she'd be an asset, but I'm sure whatever she's doing is vital to our mission
All these donuts are mine and I'm going to eat them while I vent.
So there.


So I'm reading HeyRube's blog, and he's going on about how we're all equal, and suddenly I'm like, but are we really?
Take my partner. She has the attention span of a gnat and eats bicycles when she gets bored.
And then she eats brains and turns into a robot— I mean, a metaphorical robot, not a robot robot.
Y'know, smart and kinda scary.
Sorry, is this still the interrogation?
I ask the questions here, civilian.


Smart Unity gives me the willies. But am I just worried that if she gets too advanced I'll lose her?
Sounds like you have issues to work out.
But what do **you** think?
I'm an ordinary citizen who's been in a police questioning room for 48 hours.
You should talk to a pro. Someone with insight into behavior and emotional finesse.
But am I just worried that if she gets too advanced I'll lose her?
The **scrip** do I care?

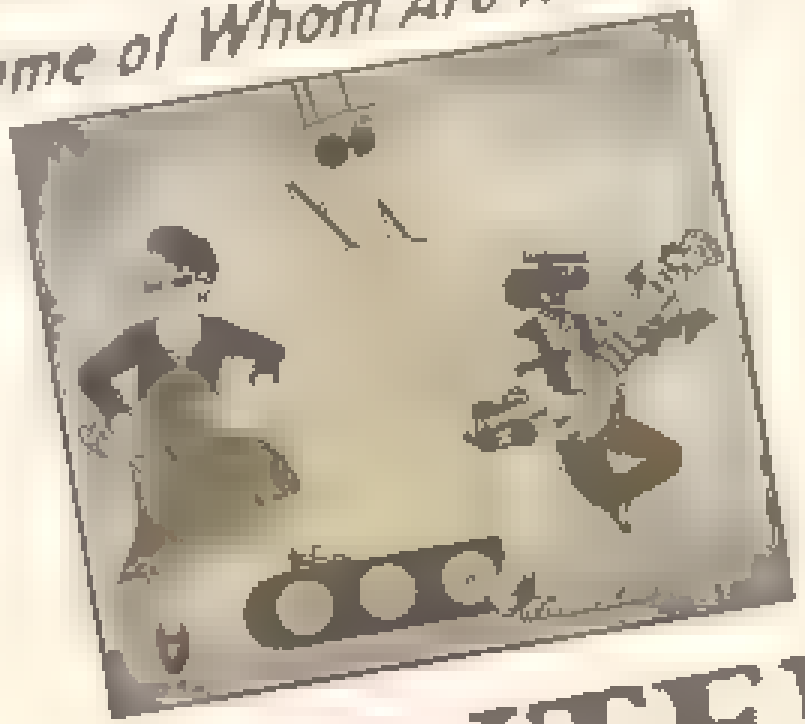

Leaves! Leaves leaves leaves!
Er... very nice.
Having worked with the undead, I wonder if we should direct her a bit more?
Stage B in three... two...
Taxodium distichum. Strange. This is native to the Gulf Coast
Would microscopic analysis help?
Would it!
Granted, I'd never seen Stage B.
I'd never heard of Stage B.
Science science science science!


This is bald cypress. Specifically from Louisiana.
Cypress zombies. What are they doing here?
I found a Gulf Coast biome being cultivated at Anasigma.
They have the Cypress?
According to the power feed, a line's been tapped for something big down here.
This is terrible.
Somehow I'm the least-informed person in the room.
Sorry you'll have to squeak by on your chiseled good looks.

REWARD

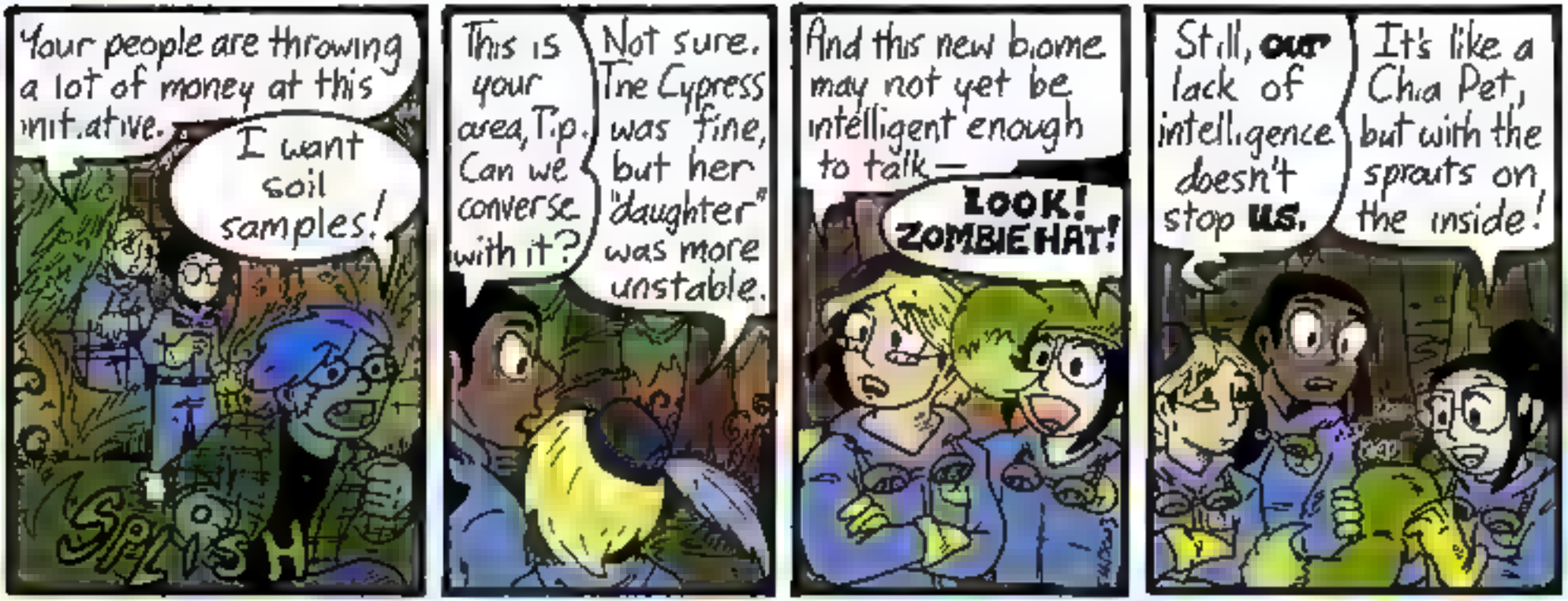
for the Capture of Rogue G-Men

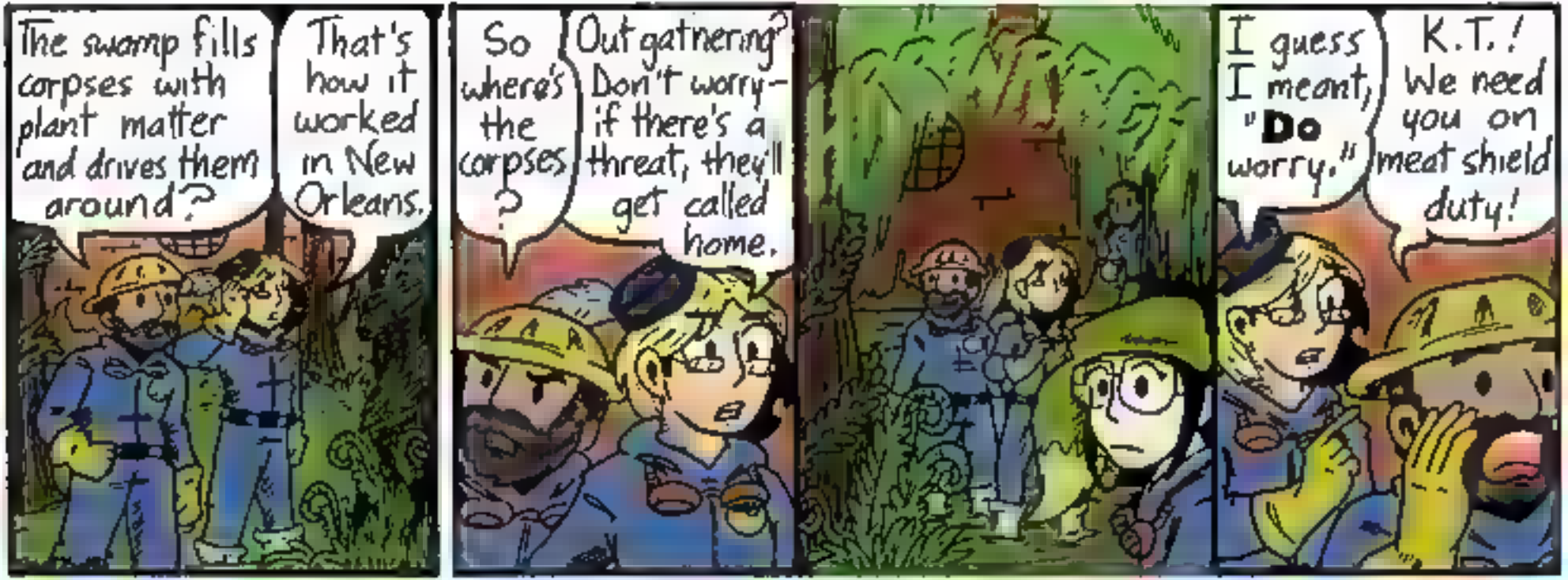
Some of Whom Are Robots



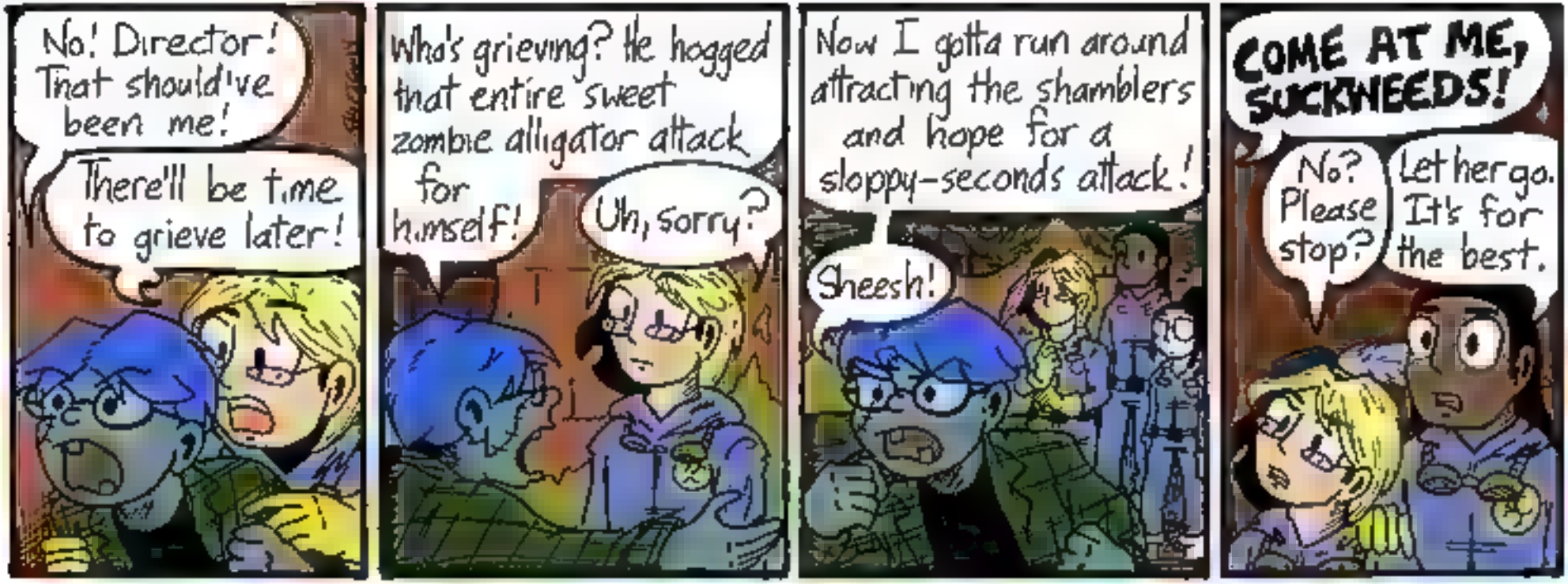
WANTED

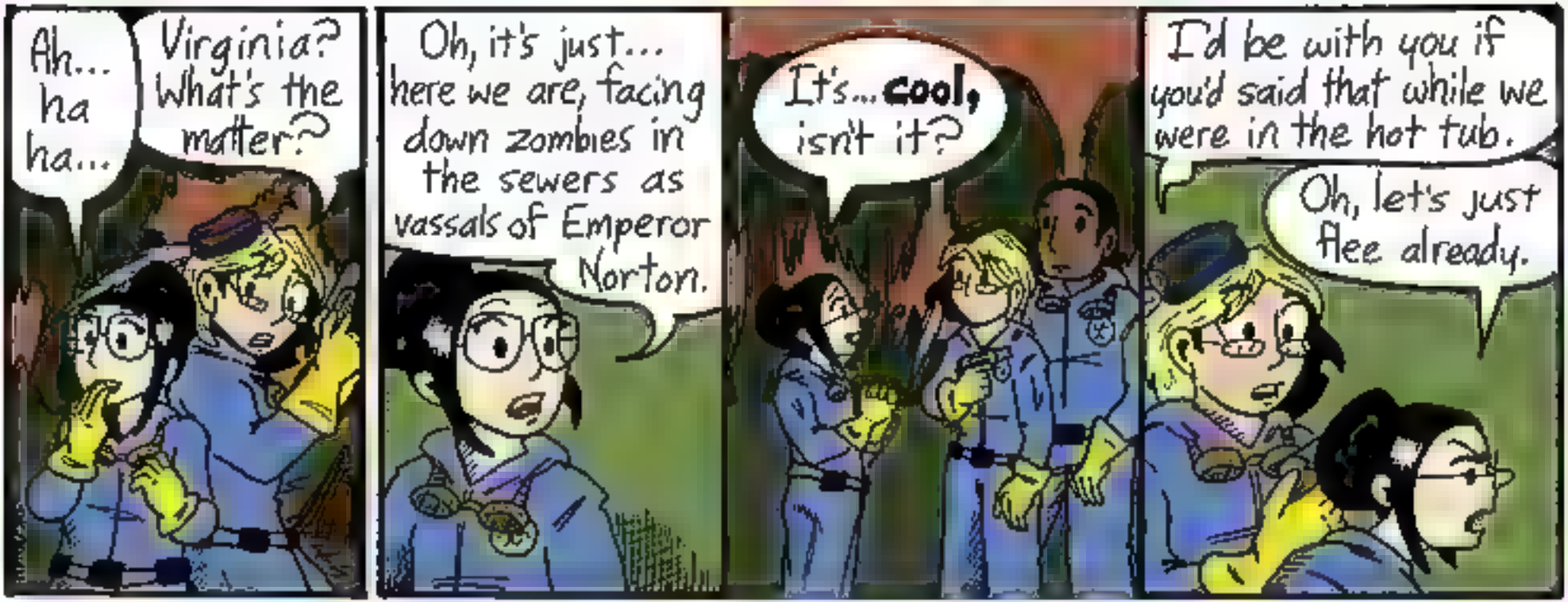

The nonhuman community suspected the fire that destroyed the Cypress was an orchestrated attack.
Violence against a gestalt intelligence?
Yes. But also harvesting.
Clearly Anasigma is cultivating its own Cypress to stage zombie attacks and foment fear of the undead!
Congrats. Your deductive skills saved us 15 seconds.
Still counts as a punch on my card.


Your people are throwing a lot of money at this initiative.
I want soil samples!
SPLISH
This is your area, T.p. Can we converse with it?
Not sure. The Cypress was fine, but her "daughter" was more unstable.
And this new biome may not yet be intelligent enough to talk—
LOOK! ZOMBIE HAT!
Still, OUR lack of intelligence doesn't stop US.
It's like a Chia Pet, but with the sprouts on the inside!

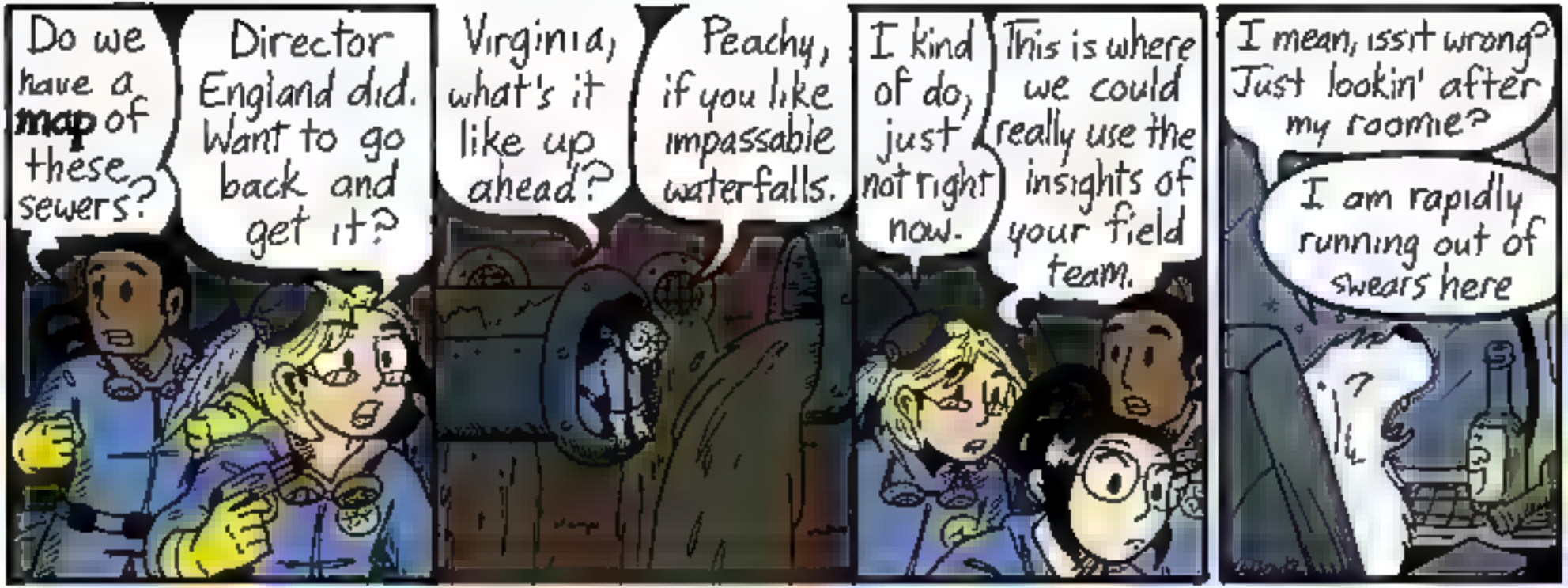

The swamp fills corpses with plant matter and drives them around?
That's how it worked in New Orleans.
So where's the corpses?
Out gatnering? Don't worry- if there's a threat, they'll get called home.
I guess I meant, "Do worry."
K.T.! We need you on meat shield duty!


Listen up! I am experienced at surviving just this type of situation! Follow me!
Yeep!
ARRGH! Rogue hat!
CHAWMP
SPLOOSH
As survival techniques go, I'd call that unorthodox.
Bad hat! Bad hat!


No! Director! That should've been me!
There'll be time to grieve later!
Who's grieving? He hogged that entire sweet zombie alligator attack for himself!
Uh, sorry?
Now I gotta run around attracting the shamblers and hope for a sloppy-seconds attack!
Sheesh!
COME AT ME, SUCKWEEDS!
No? Please stop?
Let her go. It's for the best.

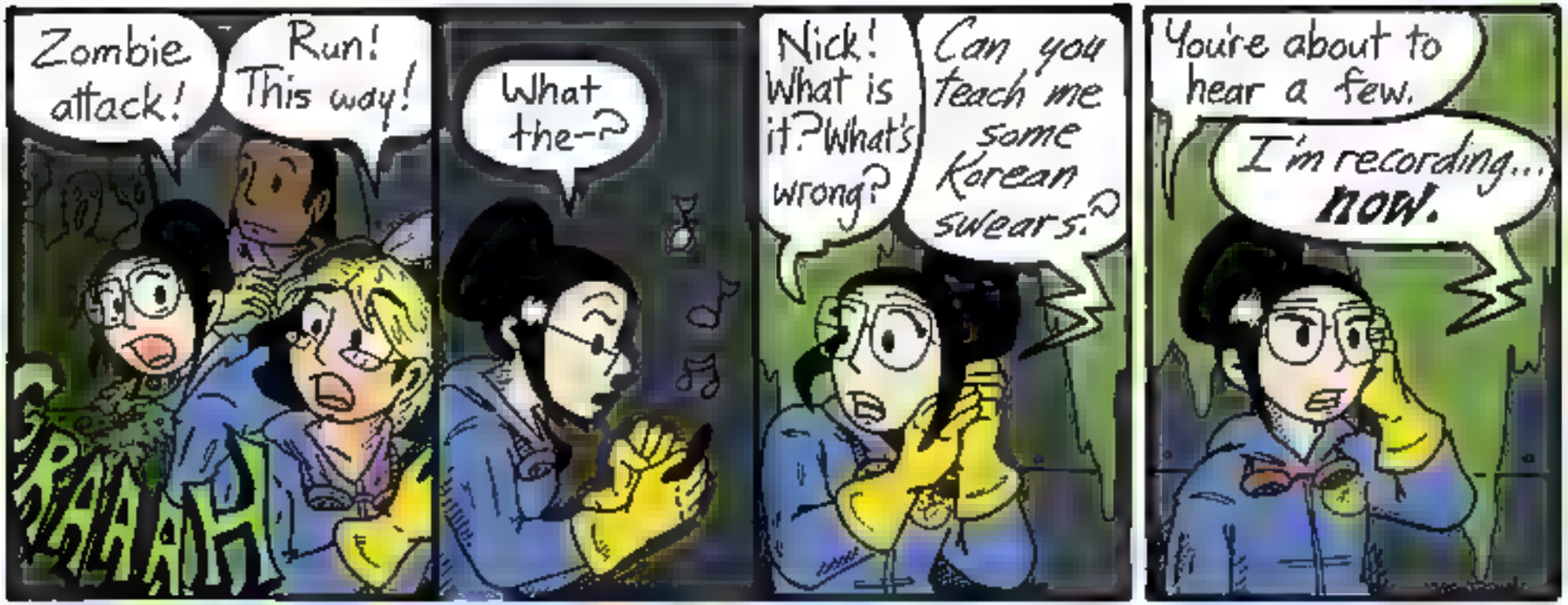

Ah... ha ha...
Virginia? What's the matter?
Oh, it's just... here we are, facing down zombies in the sewers as vassals of Emperor Norton.
It's... cool, isn't it?
I'd be with you if you'd said that while we were in the hot tub.
Oh, let's just flee already.

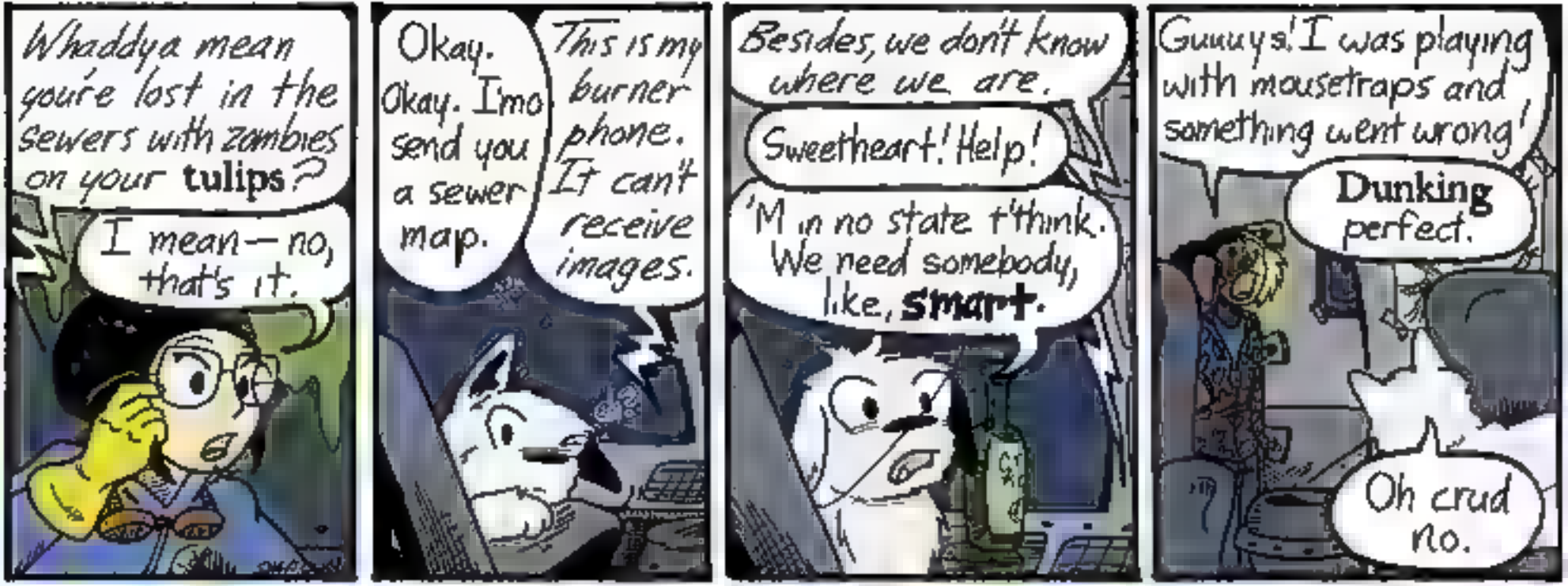

I've never been invited to a sleepover! I had one at my house but Blossom got out of her oubliette and started spitting acid and everybody remembered they had to go home early.
Blossom's my pony.
Only not really.
Anyway, better brace yourselves, because my mom packed a special surprise!
Um.
Marshmallows.
WHEW

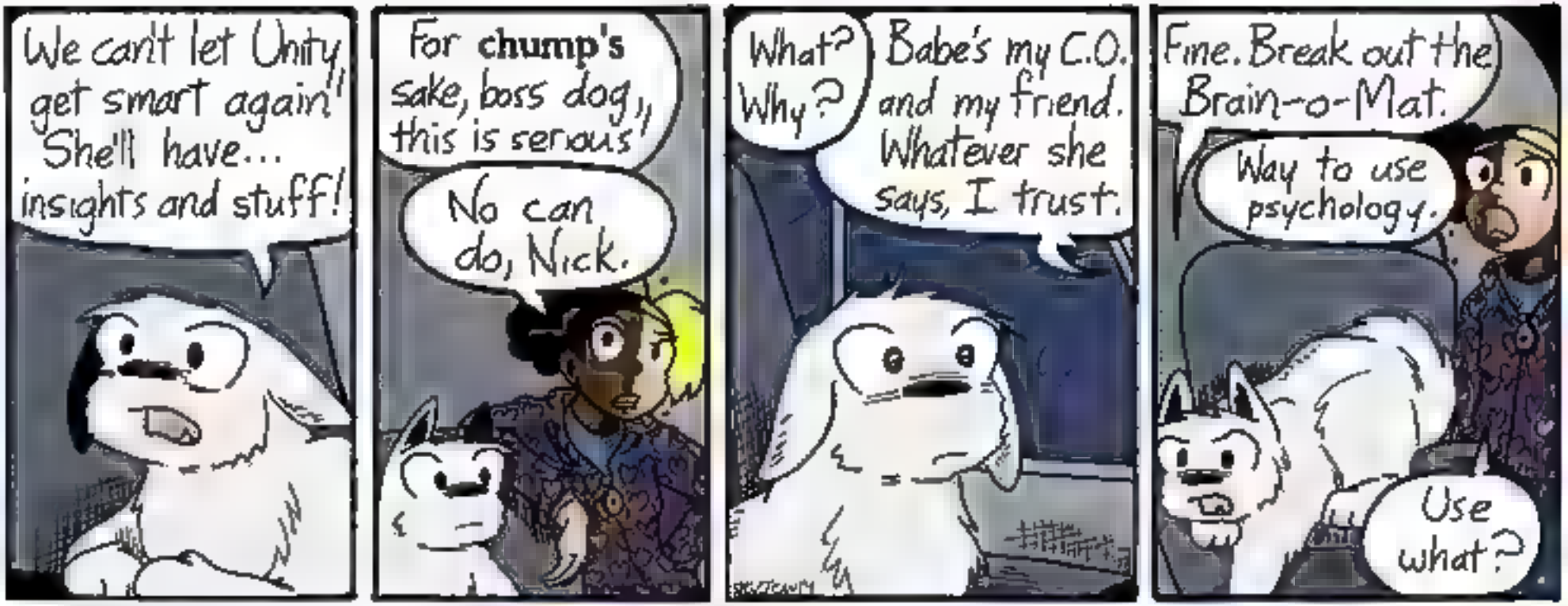

Do we have a map of these sewers?
Director England did. Want to go back and get it?
Virginia, what's it like up ahead?
Peachy, if you like impassable waterfalls.
I kind of do, just not right now.
This is where we could really use the insights of your field team.
I mean, issit wrong? Just lookin' after my roomie?
I am rapidly running out of swears here


That's it. I'm getting a dog lock on the booze fridge.
Aw, y'r just crabby cuz you had some spat with Da'ar Lee.
What? No. Shut up.
Iss so obvious even Tip's catching on. Y'oughta tell her how you feel.
I ain't doing bupkis. Don't even know what you're talking about.
Serious. Don' be like me...
Drunk and smelling like wet dog? Way ahead of you.
Issa moisture inna air!


It's not that **rotating** simple! Even if she was– I mean, if she really wanted–
Yeah, forget it.
And it's not like I can take a chick to dinner and a movie, let alone... uh... stuff...
Mn.
Bivalve, get off my **sweet spring**! I just– oh no. Oh no no no.
Eh? What?
The swear filter's learned **fur-curdling** Yiddish.
Y'got any snacks back there?


Zombie attack!
Run! This way!
BRAAAH
What the-?
Nick! What is it? What's wrong?
Can you teach me some Korean swears?
You're about to hear a few.
I'm recording... NOW.


Whaddya mean you're lost in the sewers with zombies on your **tulips**?
I mean—no, that's it.
Okay. Okay. I'mo send you a sewer map.
This is my burner phone. It can't receive images.
Besides, we don't know where we are.
Sweetheart! Help!
'M in no state t'think. We need somebody, like, **smart**.
Guuuys! I was playing with mousetraps and something went wrong!
Dunking perfect.
Oh crud no.


We can't let Unity get smart again! She'll have... insights and stuff!
For chump's sake, boss dog, this is serious!
No can do, Nick.
What? Why?
Babe's my C.O. and my friend. Whatever she says, I trust.
Fine. Break out the Brain-o-Mat.
Way to use psychology.
Use what?

rustle

Skin-Deep by TuiteyFruity

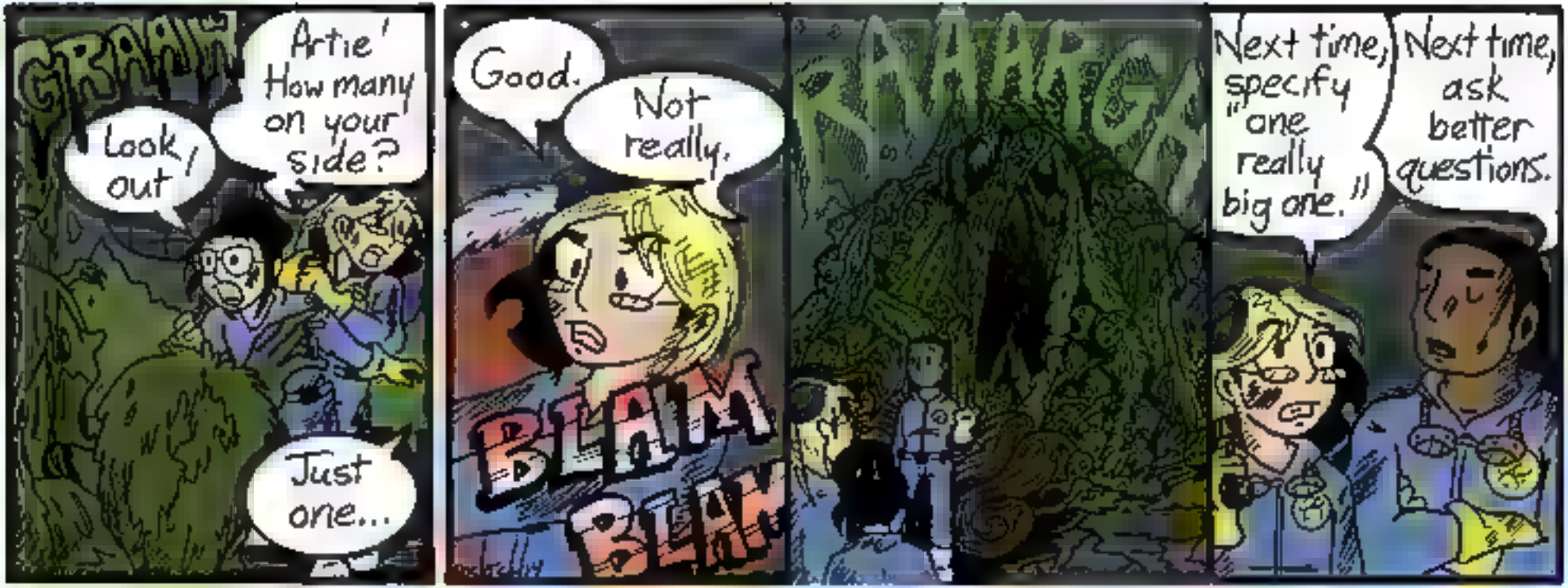
based on a fan fiction of the same name

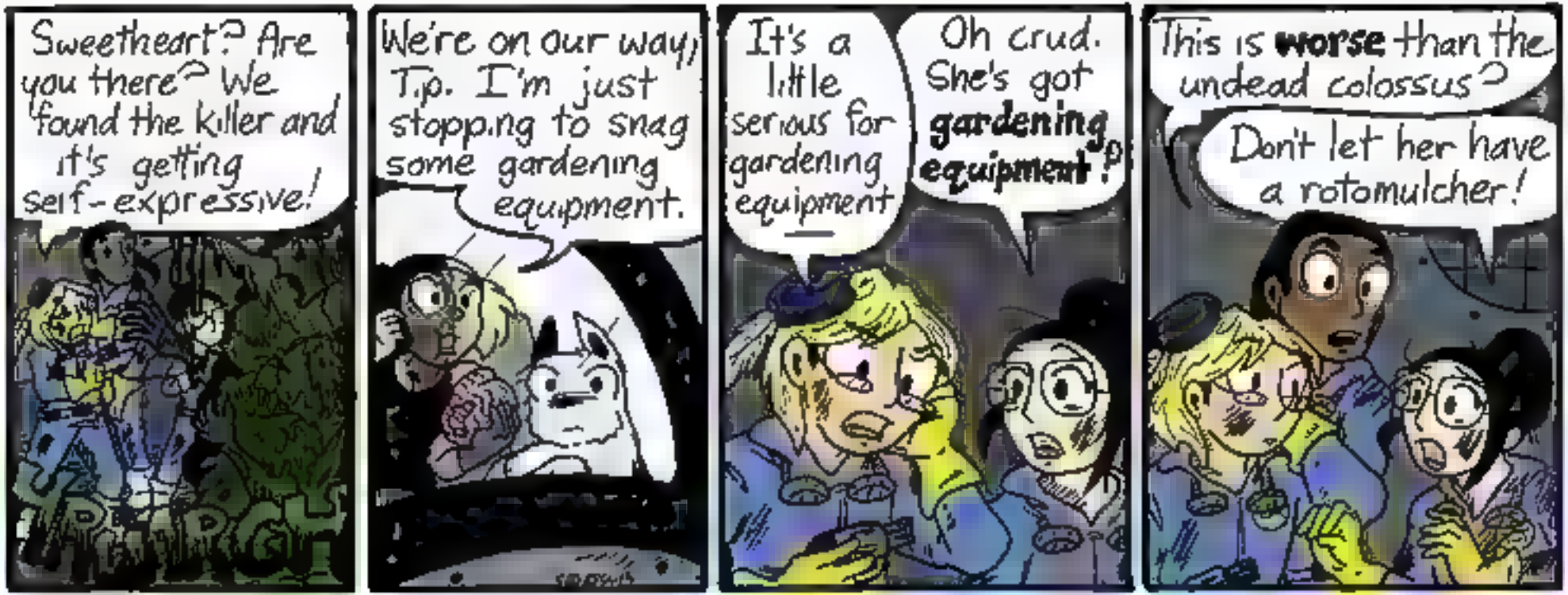
I THINK WE LOST THEM.

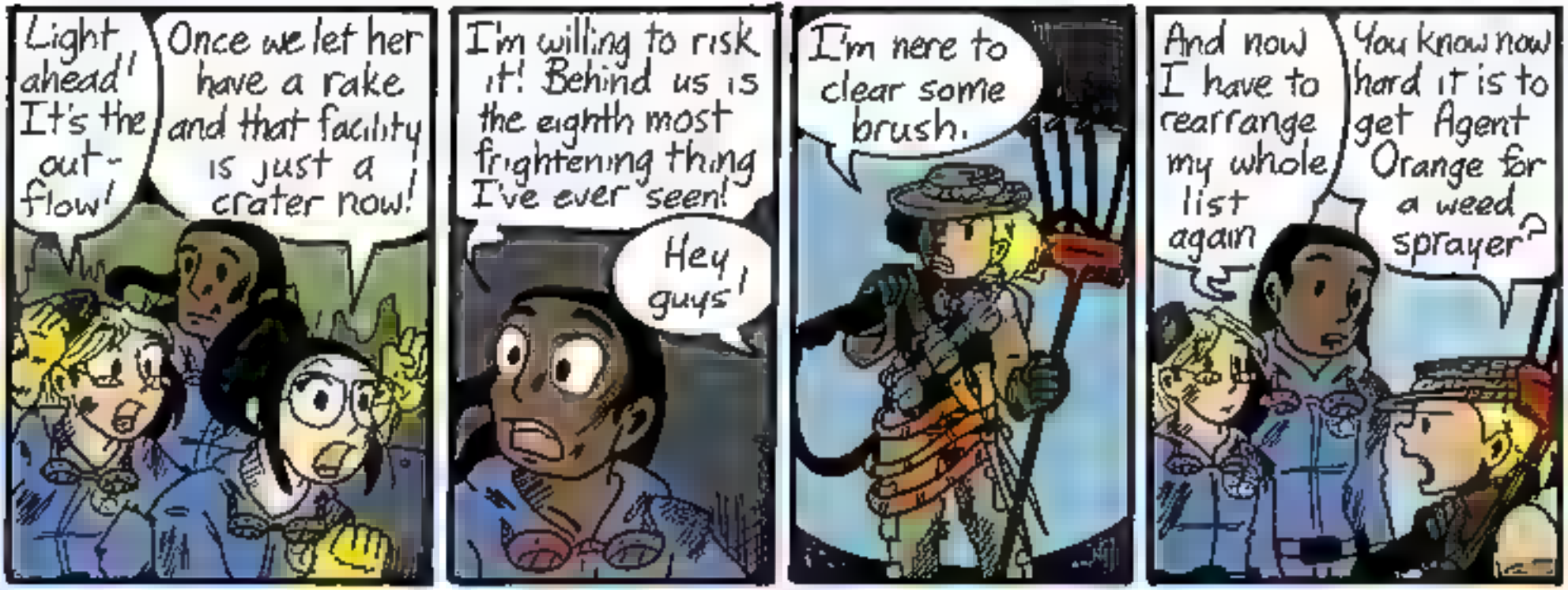
SKREEEEEEEEE!

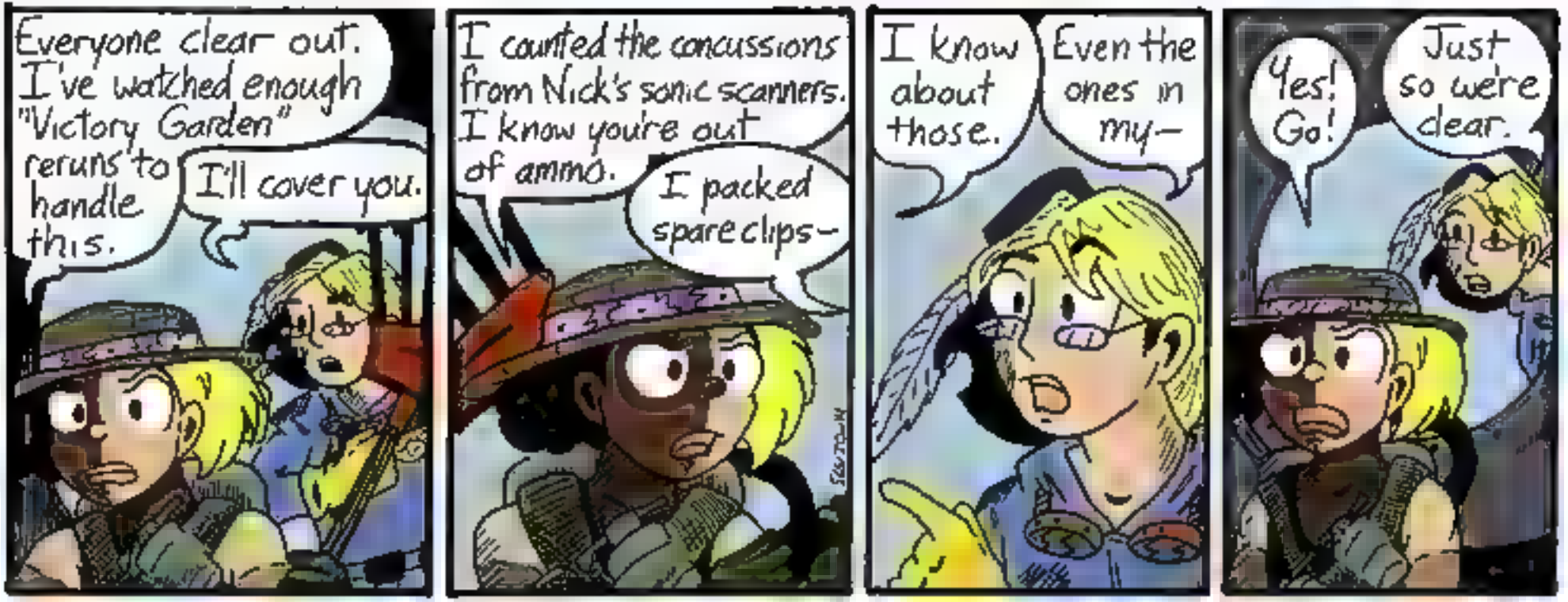
WHAT!?

I BLAME TIP


GRAAH!
Look out!
Artie! How many on your side?
Just one...
Good.
Not really.
BLAM BLAM
RAHARGH
Next time, specify "one really big one."
Next time, ask better questions.


Sweetheart? Are you there? We found the killer and it's getting self-expressive!
We're on our way, T.p. I'm just stopping to snag some gardening equipment.
It's a little serious for gardening equipment
Oh crud. She's got gardening equipment!
This is worse than the undead colossus?
Don't let her have a rotomulcher!


Light ahead! It's the out-flow!
Once we let her have a rake and that facility is just a crater now!
I'm willing to risk it! Behind us is the eighth most frightening thing I've ever seen!
Hey, guys!
I'm here to clear some brush.
And now I have to rearrange my whole list again
You know how hard it is to get Agent Orange for a weed sprayer?

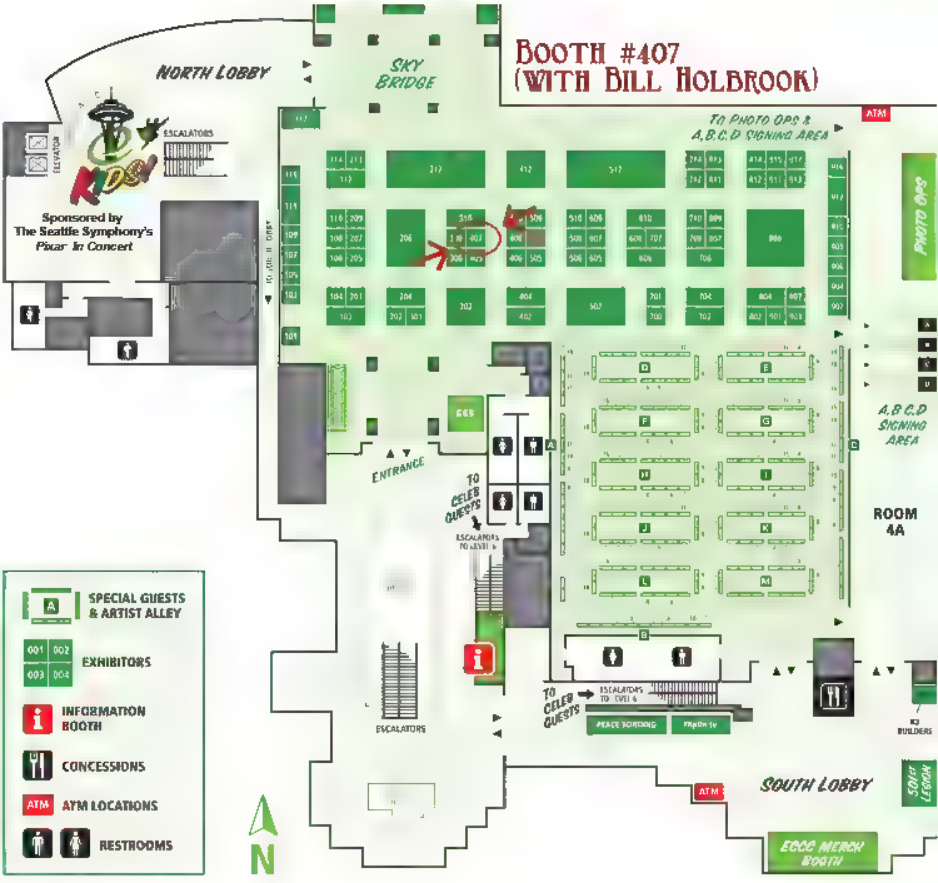

Everyone clear out. I've watched enough "Victory Garden" reruns to handle this.
I'll cover you.
I counted the concussions from Nick's sonic scanners. I know you're out of ammo.
I packed spare clips—
I know about those.
Even the ones in my—
Yes! Go!
Just so we're clear.

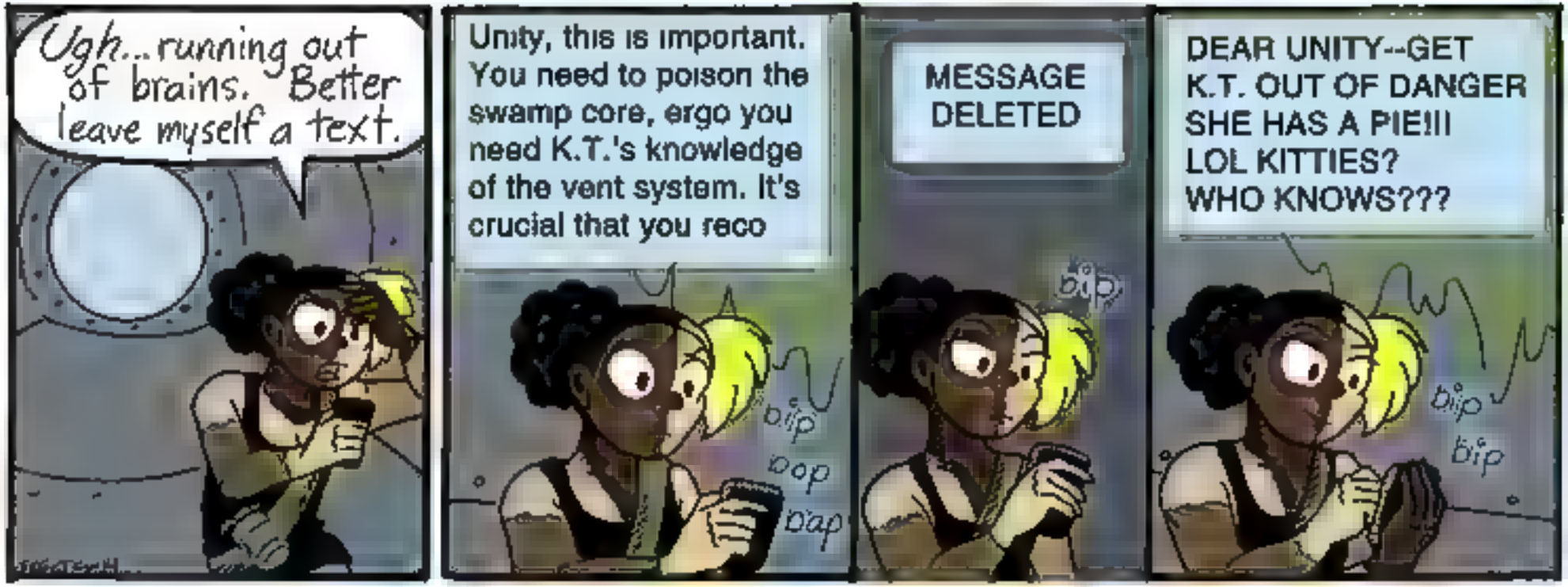

I'm sure Tip would try to preserve your life. But I know you.
You ripped me to pieces in New Orleans. We've got a history, swamp.
And now it's time for me to reap what you have sown.
ssh
We are the good guys, right?
I think I'm technically evil.

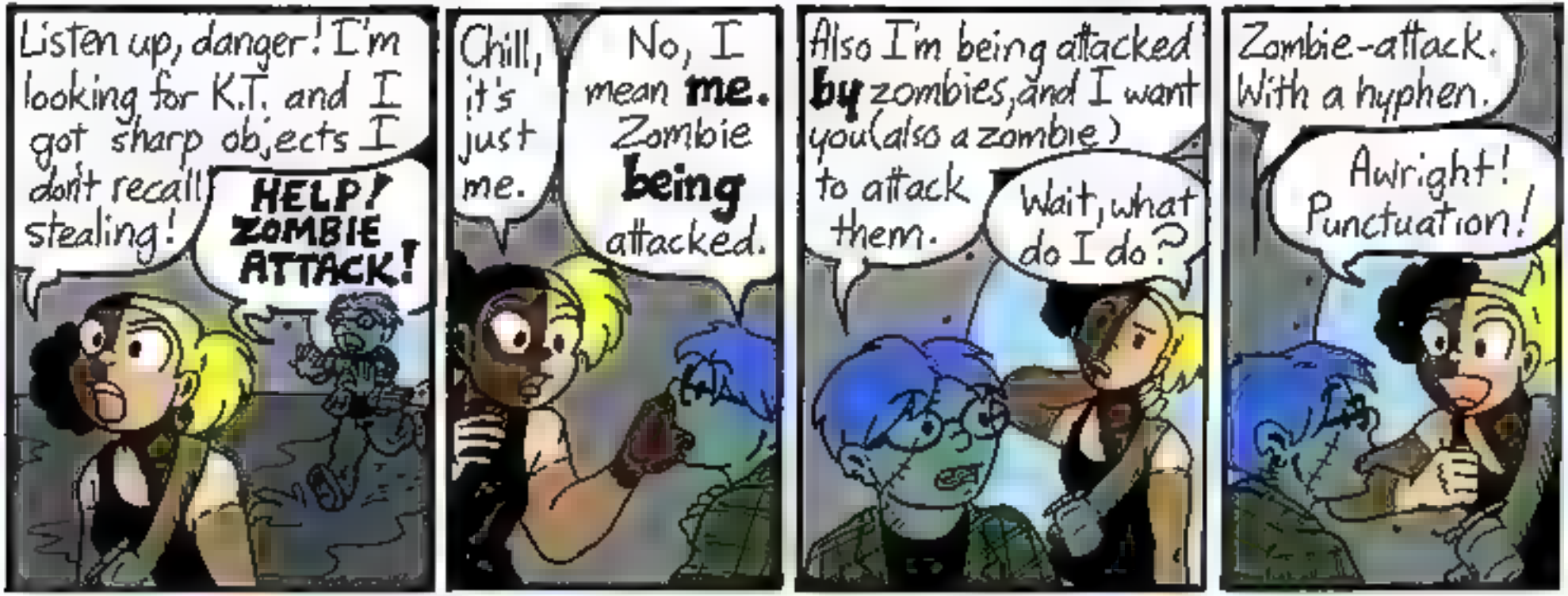

"The sun seeks out my garden,
No nook is left in shade,
No mist nor mold nor mildew
Endures on any blade."
Edna St. Vincent Millay. Nice.
Hold on. Where're the two sewer workers?
Mr. England didn't make it, and we lost K.T. in the tunnels.
You lost her?/ Am I the only useful member of this team?
Unless you can fly your own sash back, no
Wish I hadn't used up all the herbicide on my fatality move.

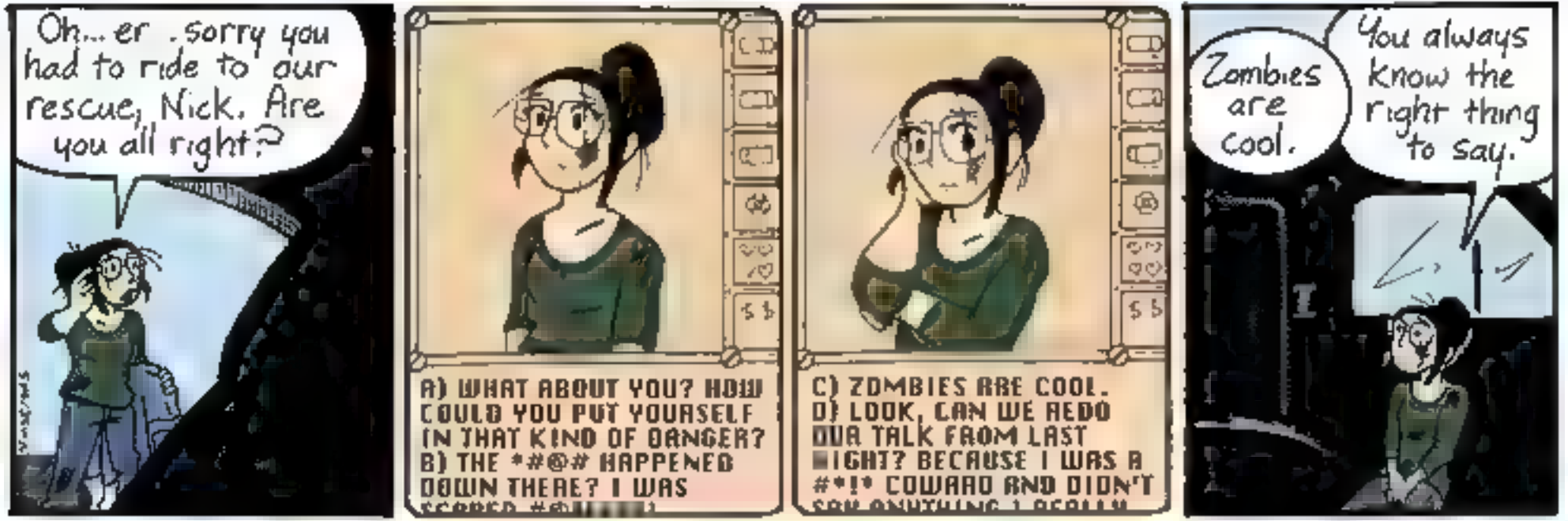
Shaenon & Jeff
at
Emerald City Comicon
Seattle, WA
March 28–30

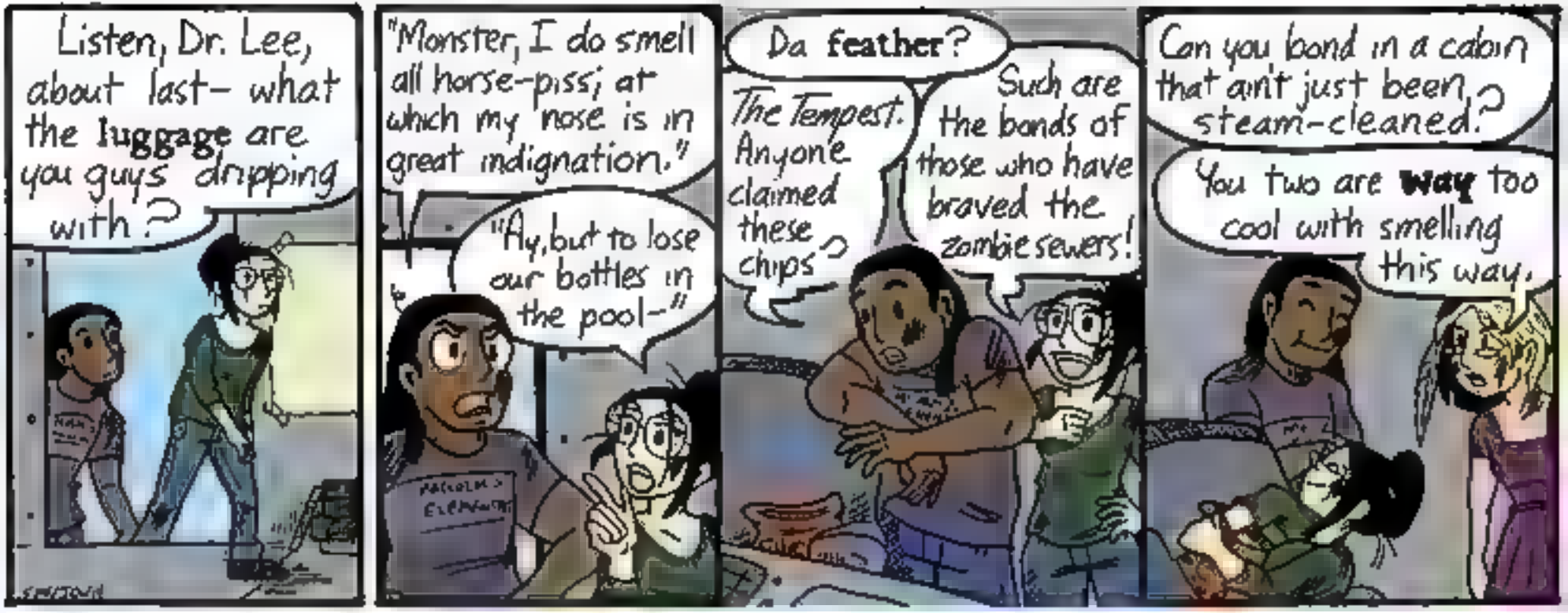


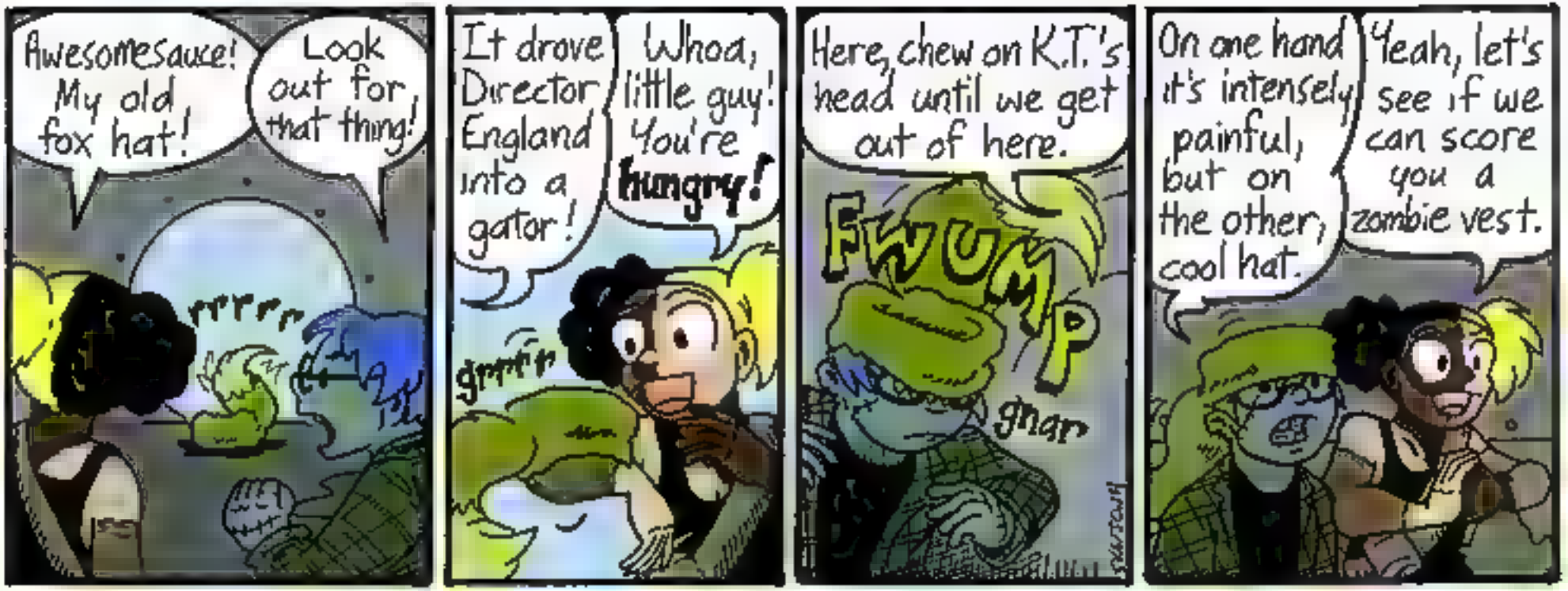


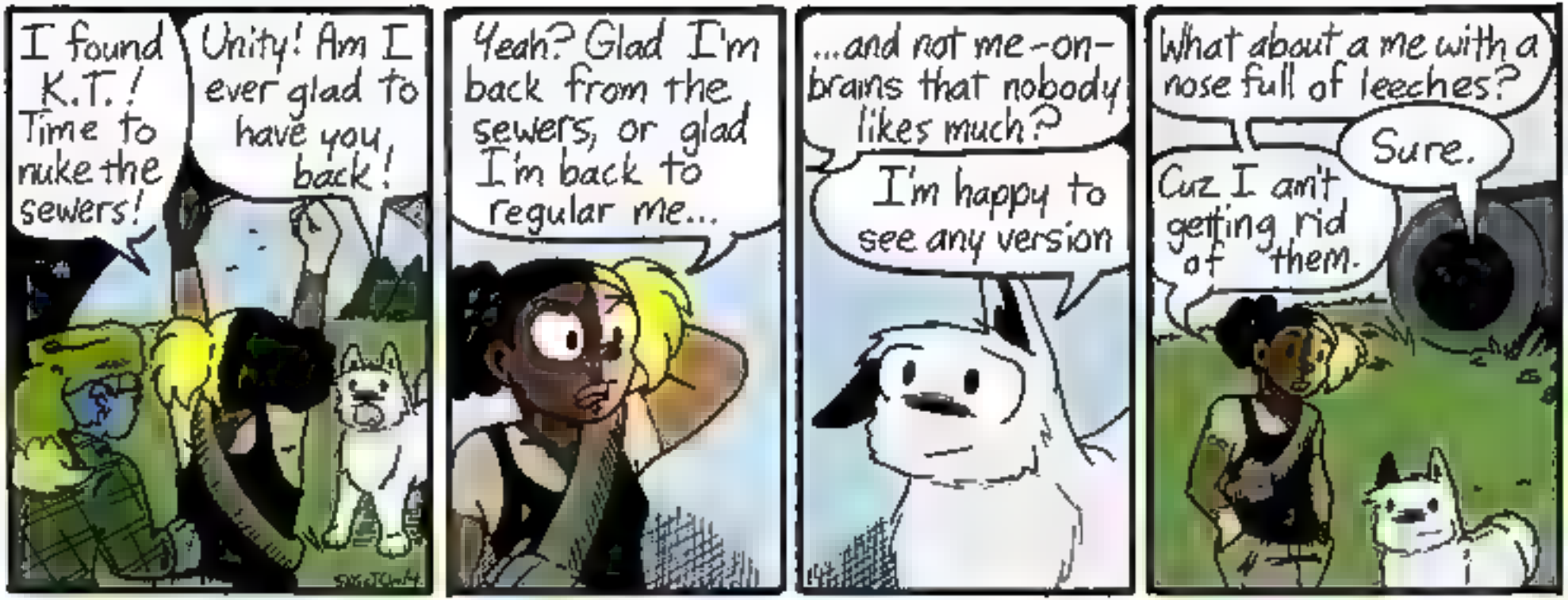

Ugh...running out of brains. Better leave myself a text.
Unity, this is important. You need to poison the swamp core, ergo you need K.T.'s knowledge of the vent system. It's crucial that you reco
bip
oop
bap
MESSAGE DELETED
bip
DEAR UNITY--GET K.T. OUT OF DANGER SHE HAS A PIE!!! LOL KITTIES? WHO KNOWS???
bip
bip

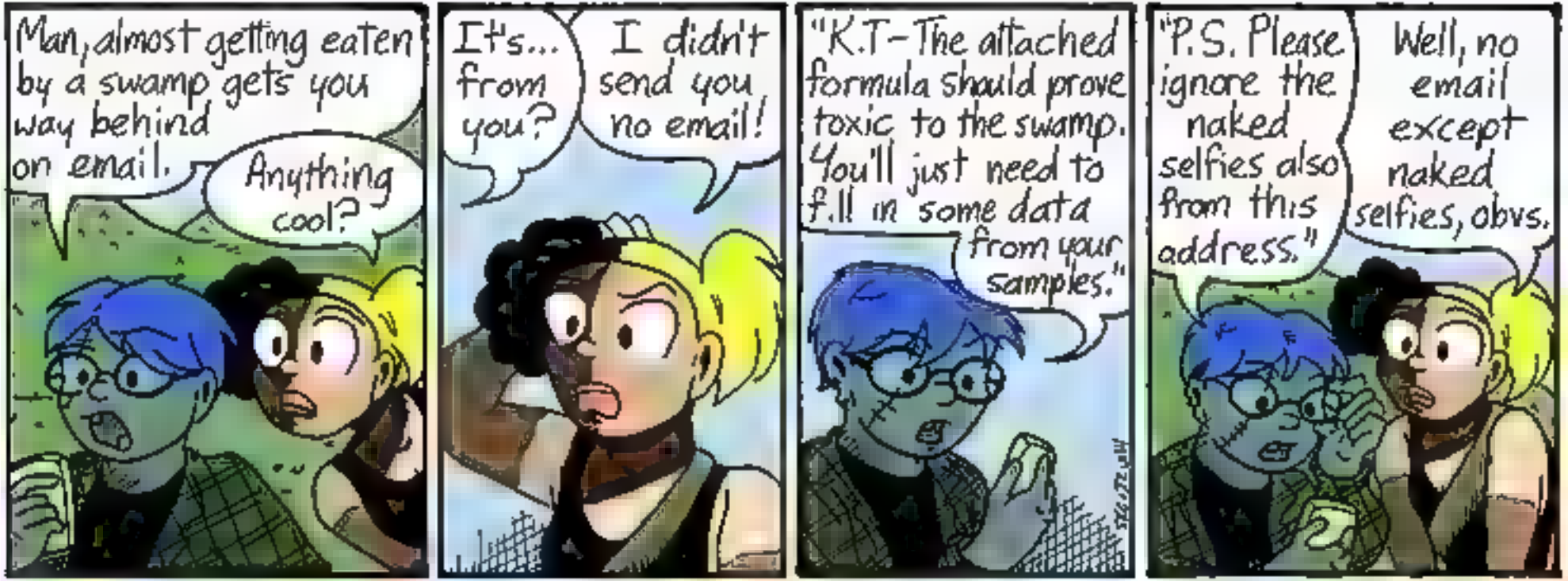

Listen up, danger! I'm looking for K.T. and I got sharp objects I don't recall stealing!
HELP! ZOMBIE ATTACK!
Chill, it's just me.
No, I mean me. Zombie being attacked.
Also I'm being attacked by zombies, and I want you (also a zombie) to attack them.
Wait, what do I do?
Zombie-attack. With a hyphen.
Awright! Punctuation!


Oh... er . sorry you had to ride to our rescue, Nick. Are you all right?
A) WHAT ABOUT YOU? HOW COULD YOU PUT YOURSELF IN THAT KIND OF DANGER?
B) THE *#@# HAPPENED DOWN THERE? I WAS
C) ZOMBIES ARE COOL.
D) LOOK, CAN WE REDO OUR TALK FROM LAST
IGHT? BECAUSE I WAS A #*!* COWARD AND DIDN'T
Zombies are cool.
You always know the right thing to say.

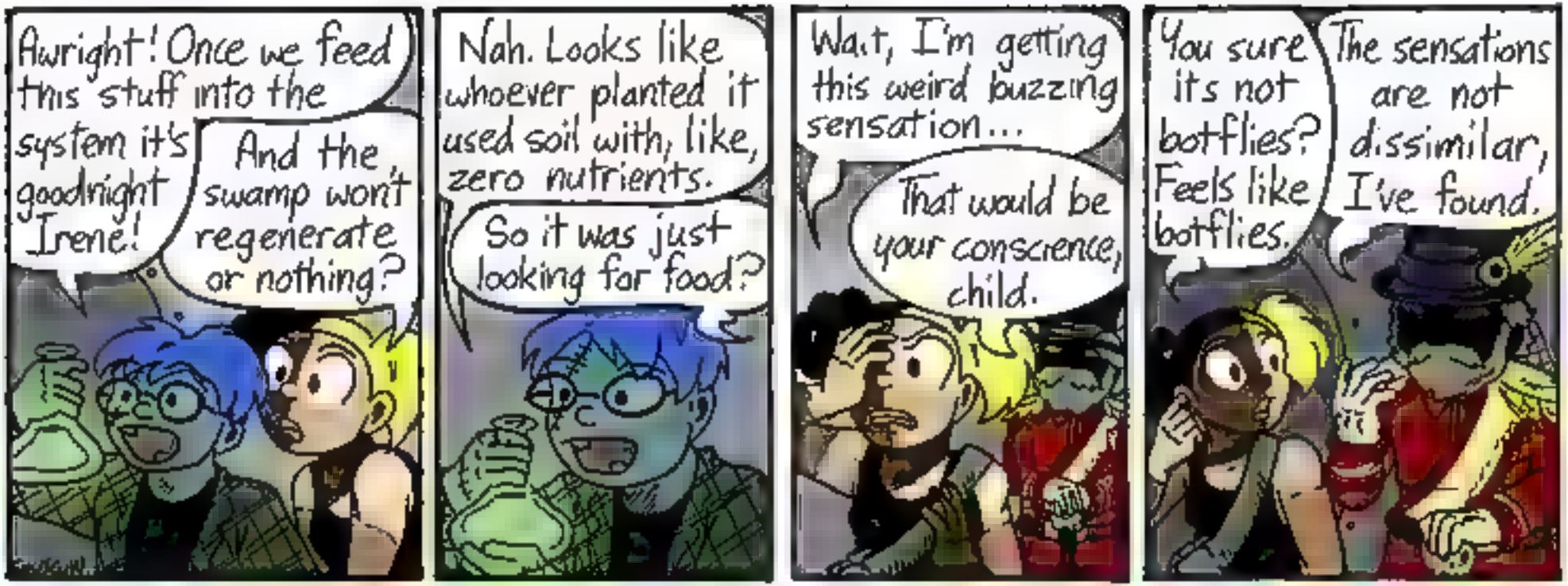

Listen, Dr. Lee, about last- what the luggage are you guys dripping with?
"Monster, I do smell all horse-piss; at which my nose is in great indignation."
"Ay, but to lose our bottles in the pool-"
Da feather?
The Tempest. Anyone claimed these chips?
Such are the bonds of those who have braved the zombie sewers!
Can you bond in a cabin that ain't just been steam-cleaned?
You two are way too cool with smelling this way.

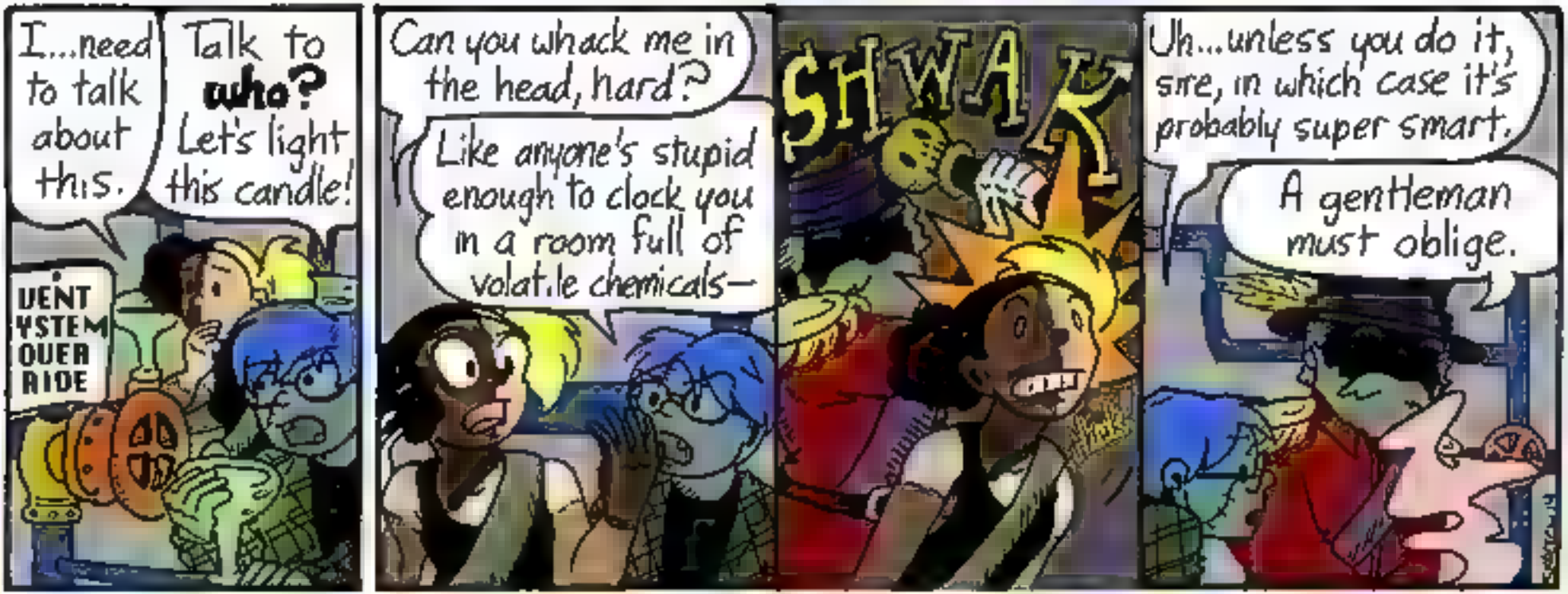

Awesomesauce! My old fox hat!
Look out for that thing!
rrrrrr
It drove Director England into a gator!
Whoa, little guy! You're hungry!
grrrrr
Here, chew on K.T.'s head until we get out of here.
FWUMP
gnar
On one hand it's intensely painful, but on the other, cool hat.
Yeah, let's see if we can score you a zombie vest.

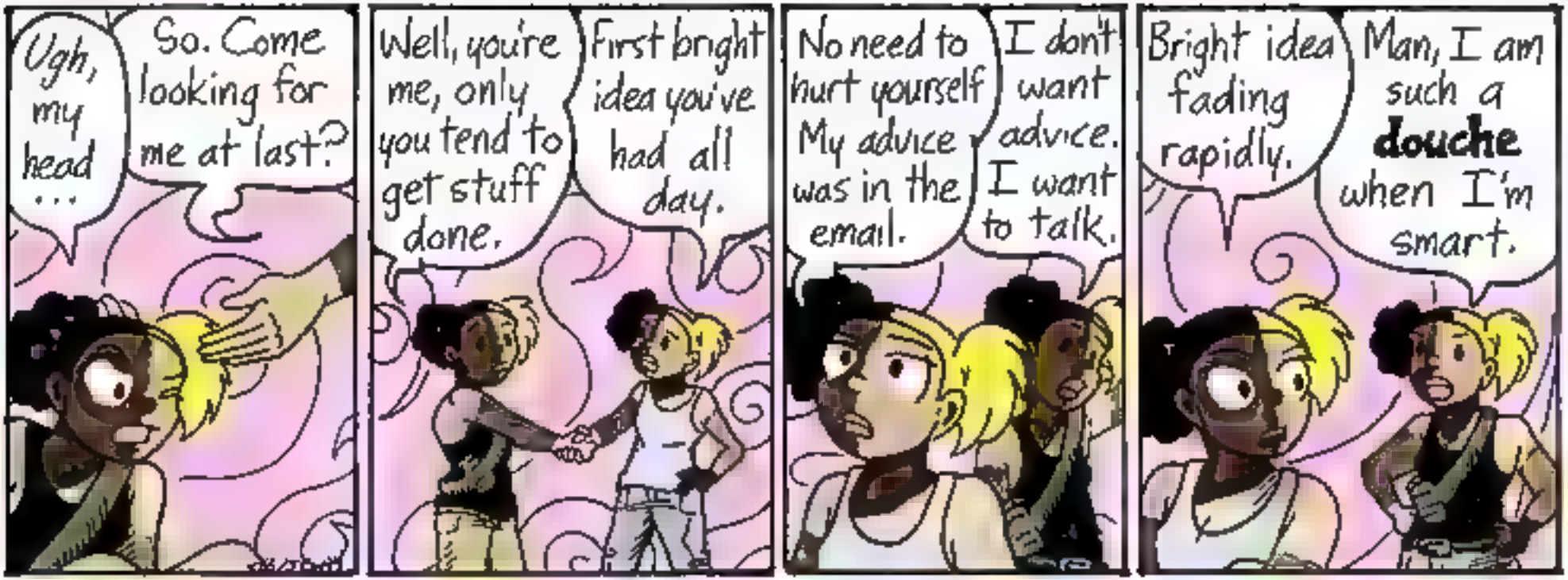

I found K.T.! Time to nuke the sewers!
Unity! Am I ever glad to have you back!
Yeah? Glad I'm back from the sewers, or glad I'm back to regular me...
...and not me-on-brains that nobody likes much?
I'm happy to see any version
What about a me with a nose full of leeches?
Sure.
Cuz I ain't getting rid of them.


Man, almost getting eaten by a swamp gets you way behind on email.
Anything cool?
It's... from you?
I didn't send you no email!
"K.T- The attached formula should prove toxic to the swamp. You'll just need to fill in some data from your samples."
"P.S. Please ignore the naked selfies also from this address."
Well, no email except naked selfies, obvs.


We can use my chem lab to synthesize— Your Majesty!
Dead Emperor! How hangs it, sire?
KLIK
All hangs as usual. I am here to observe the endgame.
Where's all your retainers and stuff?
Eaten by sharks in the room beyond that passage. Remind me to raise your salary, K.T.
So, wait, how long were you sitting here in the dark?
Not sitting. Contemplating.
And about six hours.

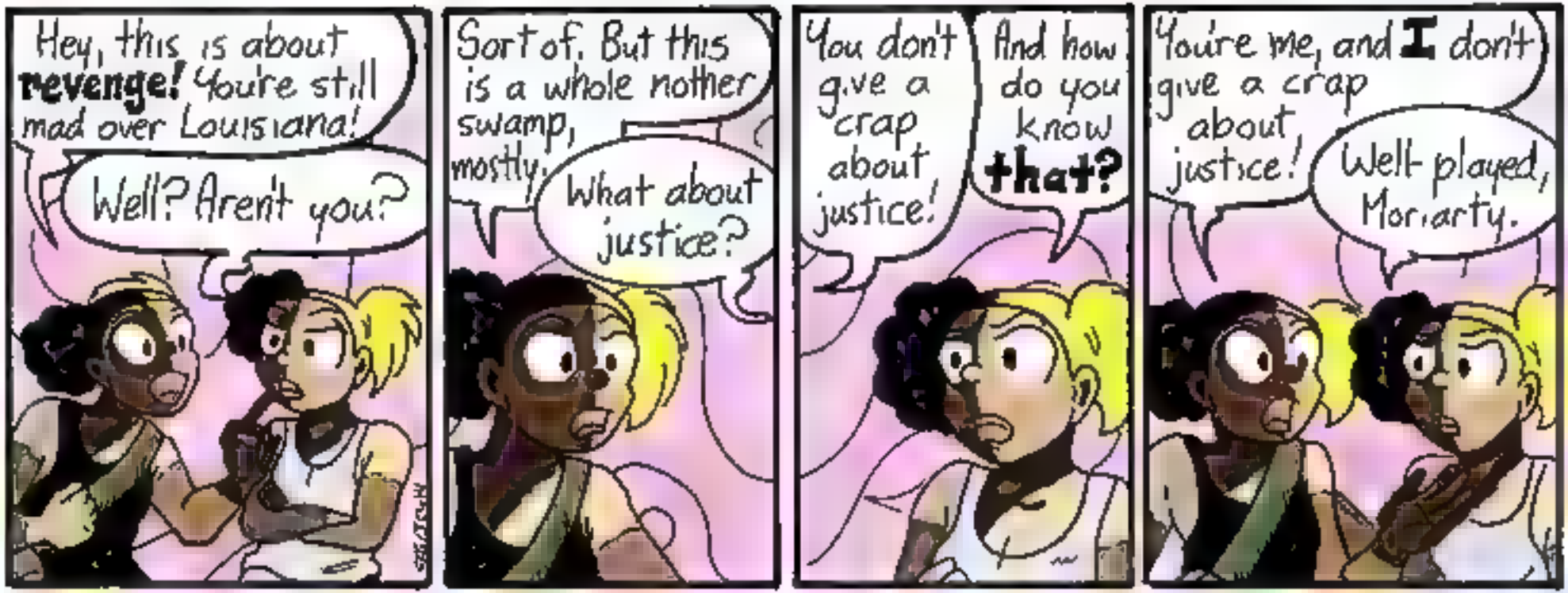

Awright! Once we feed this stuff into the system it's goodnight Irene!
And the swamp won't regenerate or nothing?
Nah. Looks like whoever planted it used soil with, like, zero nutrients.
So it was just looking for food?
Wait, I'm getting this weird buzzing sensation...
That would be your conscience, child.
You sure it's not botflies? Feels like botflies.
The sensations are not dissimilar, I've found.

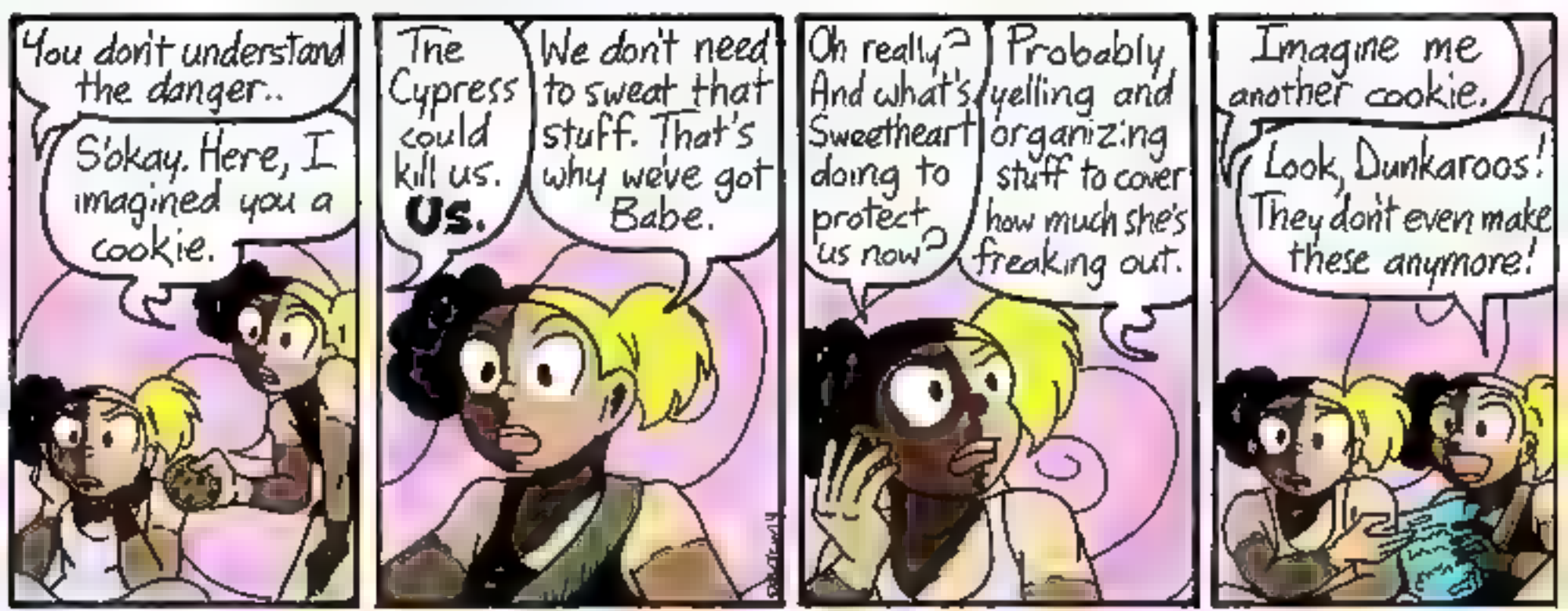

I...need to talk about this.
Talk to who? Let's light this candle!
VENT YSTEM OUER RIDE
Can you whack me in the head, hard?
Like anyone's stupid enough to clock you in a room full of volatile chemicals—
SHWAK
Uh...unless you do it, sire, in which case it's probably super smart.
A gentleman must oblige.


Ugh, my head...
So. Come looking for me at last?
Well, you're me, only you tend to get stuff done.
First bright idea you've had all day.
No need to hurt yourself My advice was in the email.
I don't want advice. I want to talk.
Bright idea fading rapidly.
Man, I am such a douche when I'm smart.

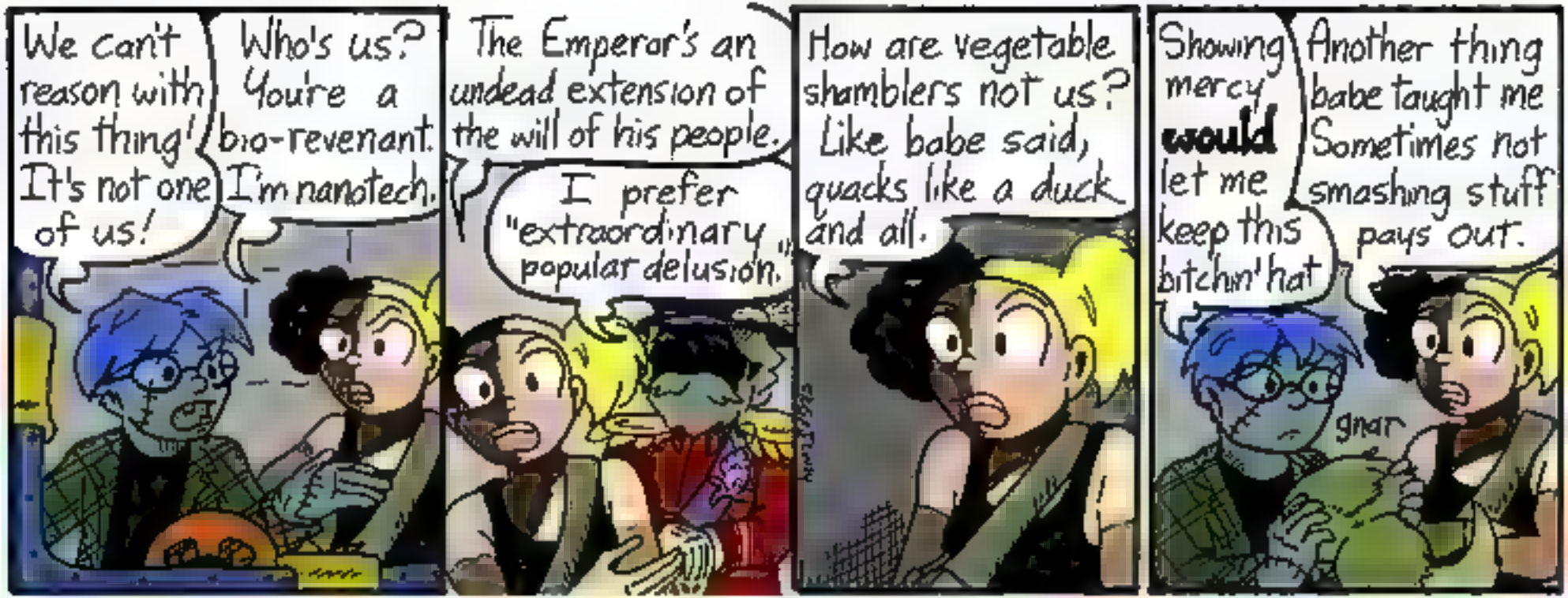

So the swamp was hungry. So what?
Once I broke into a zoo and ate a tapir when Tim Horton's ran out of crullers.
It killed people. So did the iteration in New Orleans. It must be stopped.
Nobody gave it a chance to be good!
Nothing that kills indiscriminately is going to be "good."
We kill lots of stuff, and we're good!
I'm in your mind and I can't figure out how it works.
It's great! I just work backwards from what I want!


THE TROUBLE WITH TRIBBLES
PERILS
of the
LADY GAMER
A GRAPHICAL DIVERSION
BY
SHANNON K. GARRITY

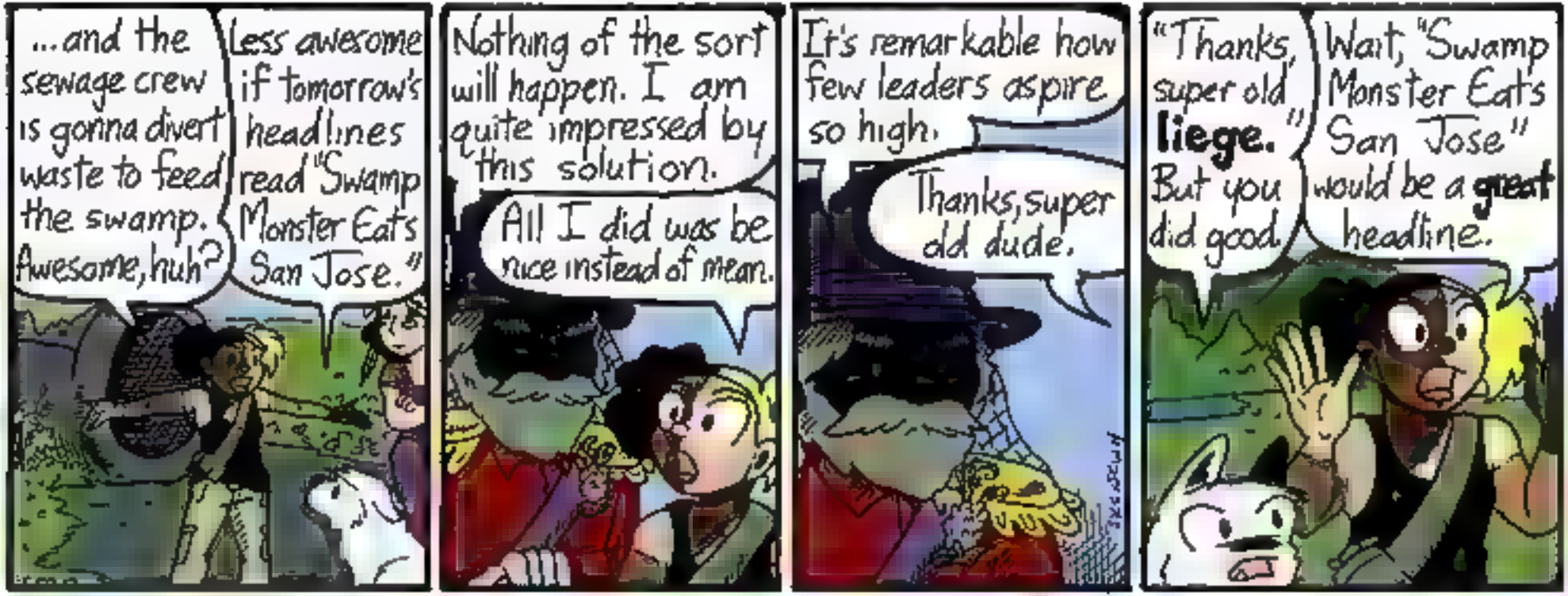

Hey, this is about **revenge!** You're still mad over Louisiana!
Well? Aren't you?
Sort of. But this is a whole nother swamp, mostly.
What about justice?
You don't give a crap about justice!
And how do you know **that?**
You're me, and **I** don't give a crap about justice!
Well played, Moriarty.


You don't understand the danger..
S'okay. Here, I imagined you a cookie.
The Cypress could kill us.
Us.
We don't need to sweat that stuff. That's why we've got Babe.
Oh really? And what's Sweetheart doing to protect us now?
Probably yelling and organizing stuff to cover how much she's freaking out.
Imagine me another cookie.
Look, Dunkaroos! They don't even make these anymore!

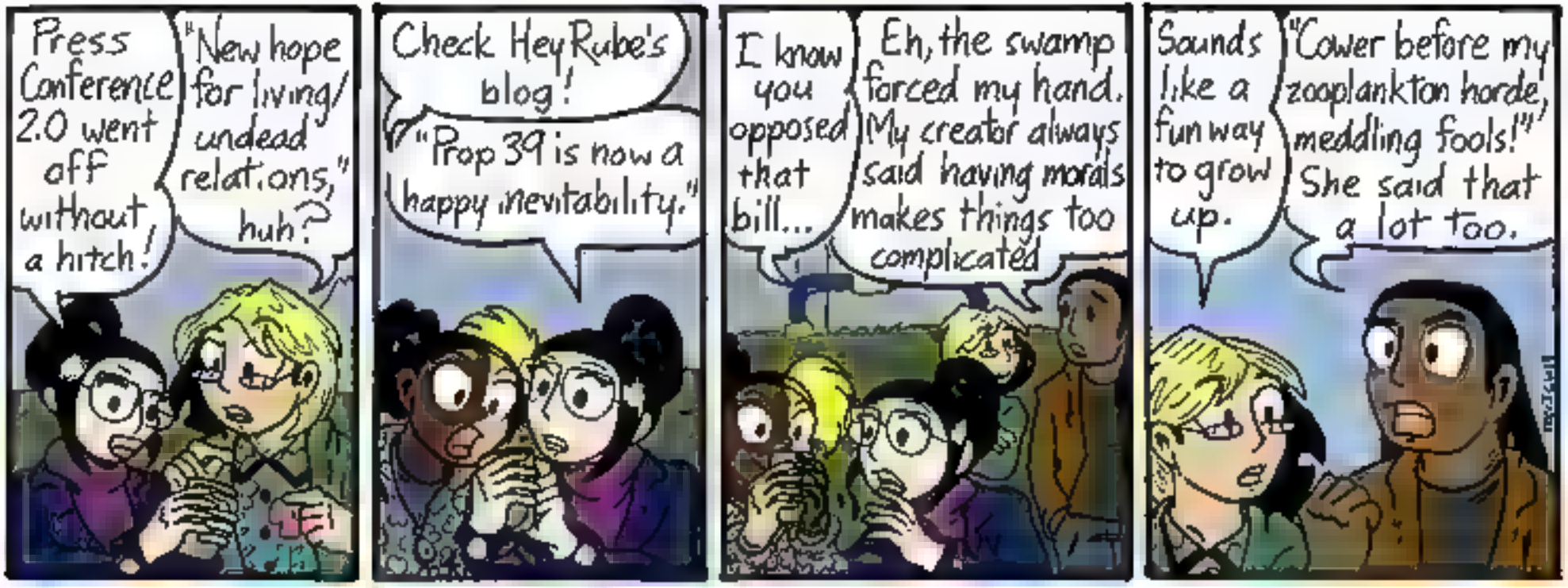

Oog hurty head ... (cookies)
Did your spirit-walk prove insightful?
Yeah, it was boss!
Okay, cool, whatever. Let's poison the swamp.
We're not going to poison it. We're going to feed it.
What? Why?
Cuz I realized I like food better than I like poison.
I can usually figure that stuff out w.thout spirit-walking.

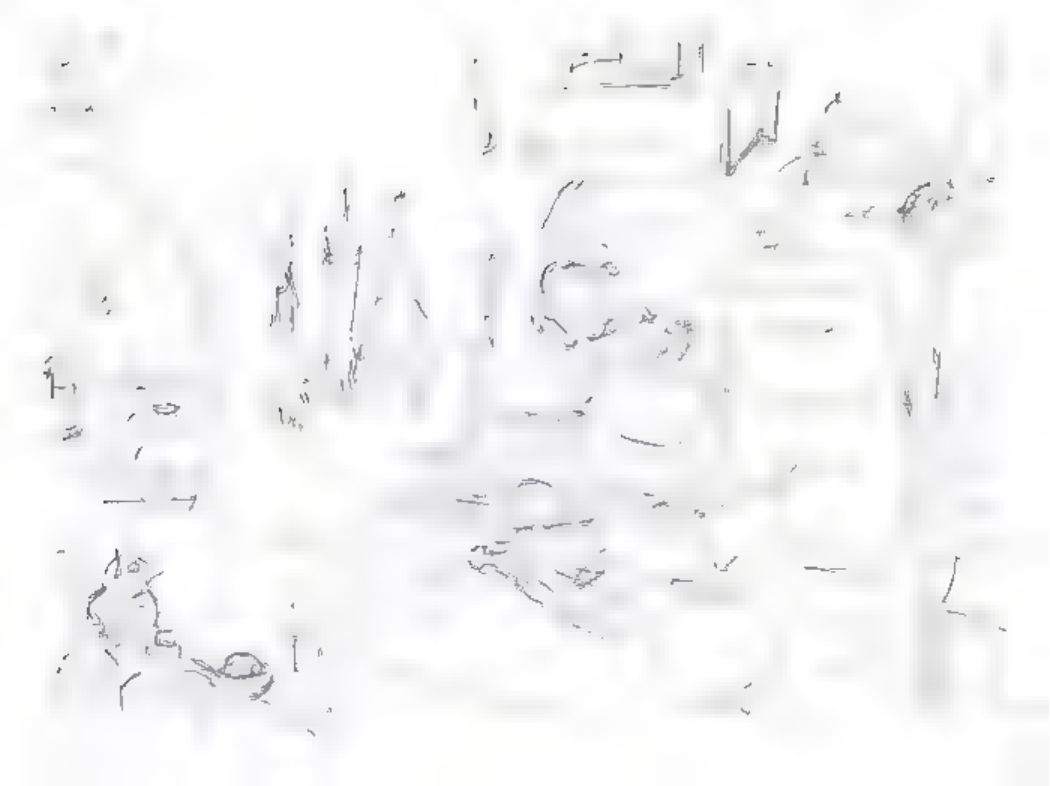

We can't reason with this thing! It's not one of us!
Who's us? You're a bio-revenant. I'm nanotech.
The Emperor's an undead extension of the will of his people.
I prefer "extraordinary popular delusion."
How are vegetable shamblers not us? Like babe said, quacks like a duck and all.
Showing mercy would let me keep this bitchin' hat
Another thing babe taught me Sometimes not smashing stuff pays out.
gnar

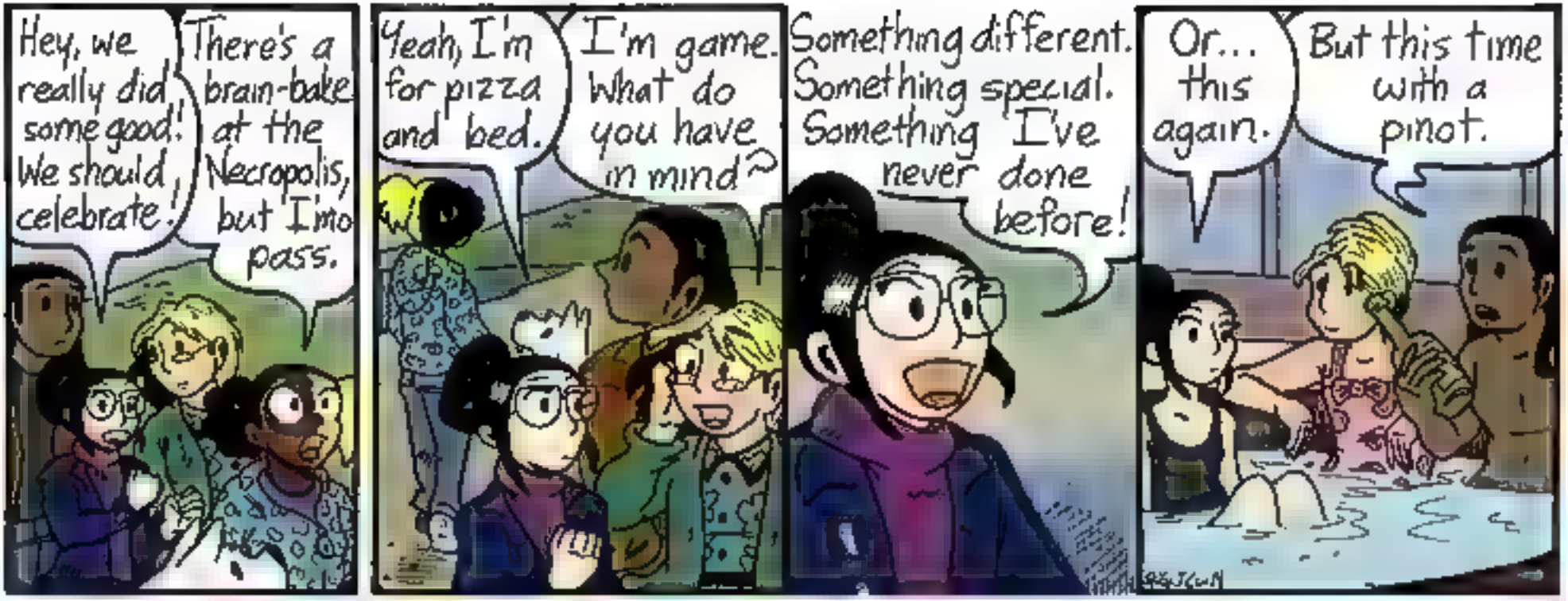

You sure you wanna let the swamp live?
It's still just a baby. It can learn from **us** instead of A-Sig.
And who can do it better than Colma? You wanna prove you've got a community going here, right?
Well, shoot. What am I gonna do with this 50-gallon mix of toxic chemicals?
Ooo, this is gonna burn twice
It dissolved my small umbrella.


...and the sewage crew is gonna divert waste to feed the swamp. Awesome, huh?
Less awesome if tomorrow's headlines read "Swamp Monster Eats San Jose."
Nothing of the sort will happen. I am quite impressed by this solution.
All I did was be nice instead of mean.
It's remarkable how few leaders aspire so high.
Thanks, super old dude.
"Thanks, super old liege." But you did good.
Wait, "Swamp Monster Eats San Jose" would be a great headline.

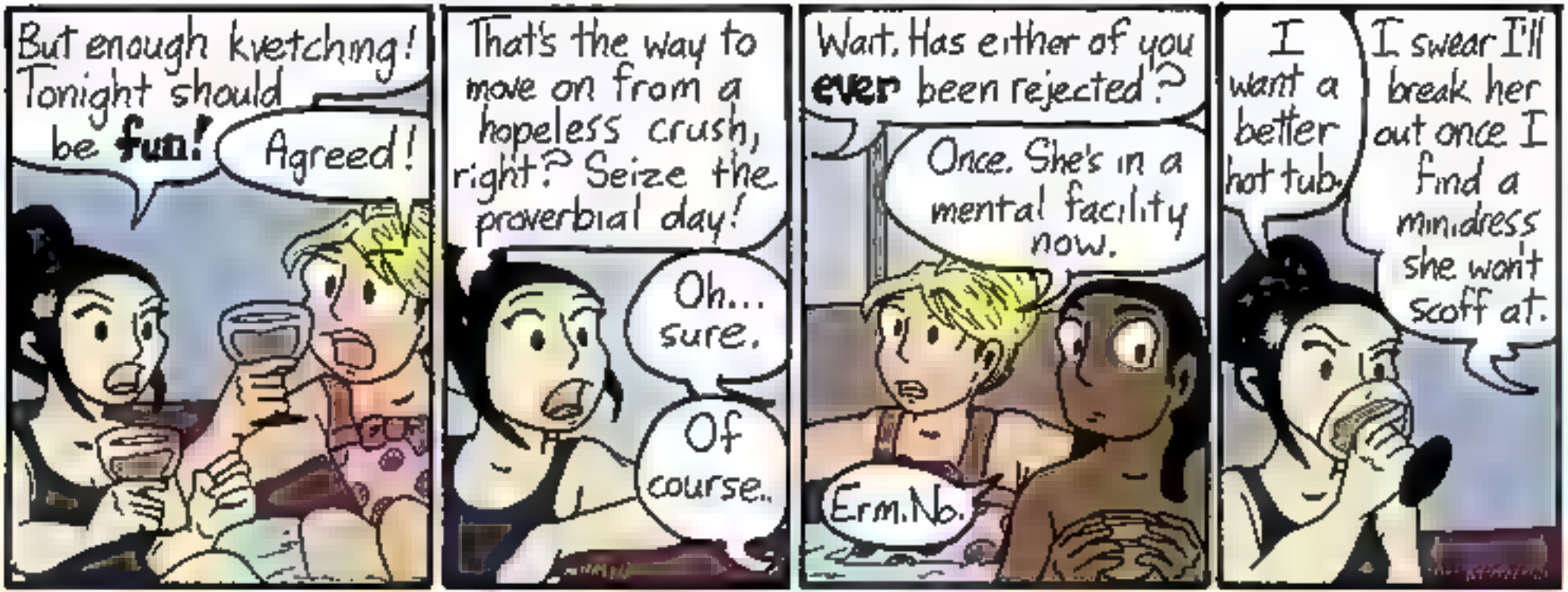



Press Conference 2.0 went off without a hitch!
"New hope for living/undead relations," huh?
Check HeyRube's blog!
"Prop 39 is now a happy inevitability."
I know you opposed that bill...
Eh, the swamp forced my hand. My creator always said having morals makes things too complicated
Sounds like a fun way to grow up.
"Cower before my zooplankton horde, meddling fools!" She said that a lot too.




Hey, we really did some good! We should celebrate!
There's a brain-bake at the Necropolis, but I'mo pass.
Yeah, I'm for pizza and bed.
I'm game. What do you have in mind?
Something different. Something special. Something I've never done before!
Or... this again.
But this time with a pinot.


...so Nick wouldn't be here if he hadn't refused to be our weapon...
A spirit too delicate to act your earthy and abhorr'd commands.
Sorry?
Oh...it's from The Tempest. That's his idea of clever, referring to Nick as our "airy spirit."
I suppose that makes me Sycorax, the witch bent around like a hoop...
Oh yes! I've seen her bend that way!
So glad I can count on you to keep up the high tenor of discourse.

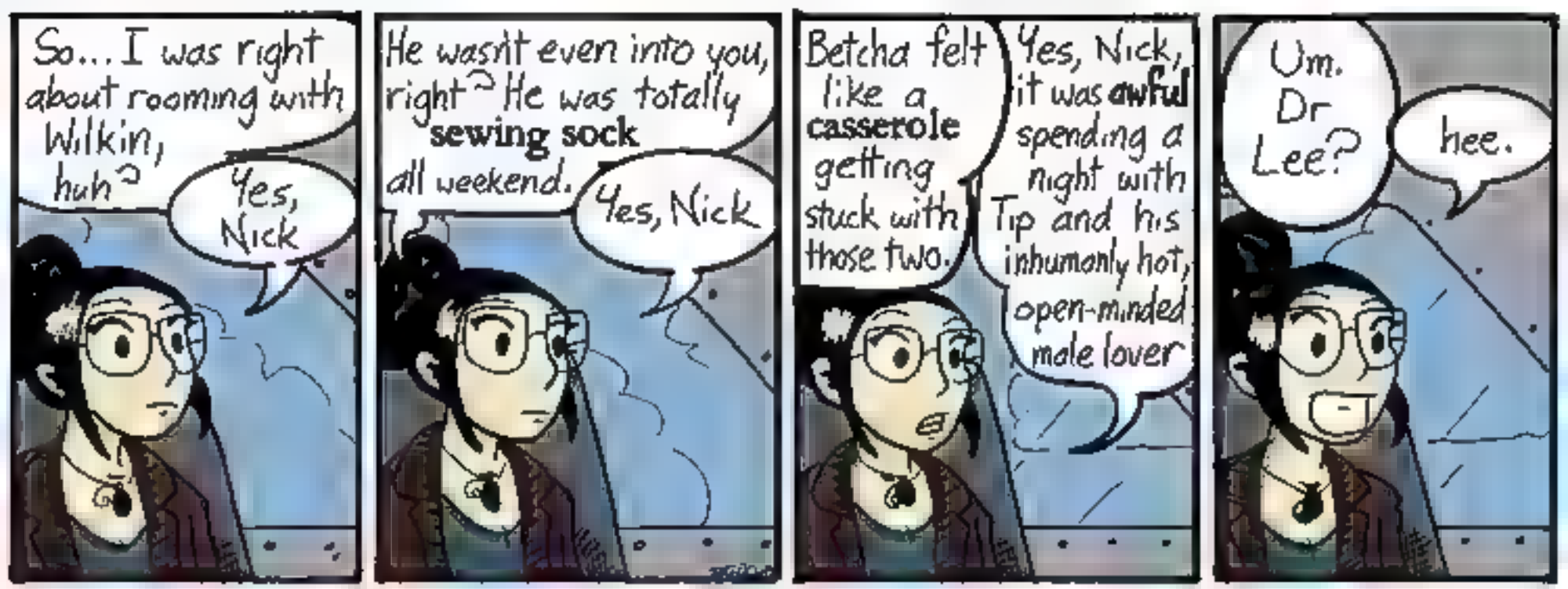

But enough kvetching! Tonight should be fun!
Agreed!
That's the way to move on from a hopeless crush, right? Seize the proverbial day!
Oh... sure.
Of course..
Wait. Has either of you ever been rejected?
Once. She's in a mental facility now.
Erm. No.
I want a better hot tub.
I swear I'll break her out once I find a minidress she won't scoff at.


Well, we've unleashed another potentially lethal nonhuman threat upon the world.
Yeah, our job is awesome.
This is serious, Unity. Humans have been able to ignore us if they need to, but not much longer. Because of us.
What will we do if people get the idea that we're dangerous?
You stop talking and I eat all comers?
Maybe I should handle the long-term planning.
Yeah, like you could stop talking.

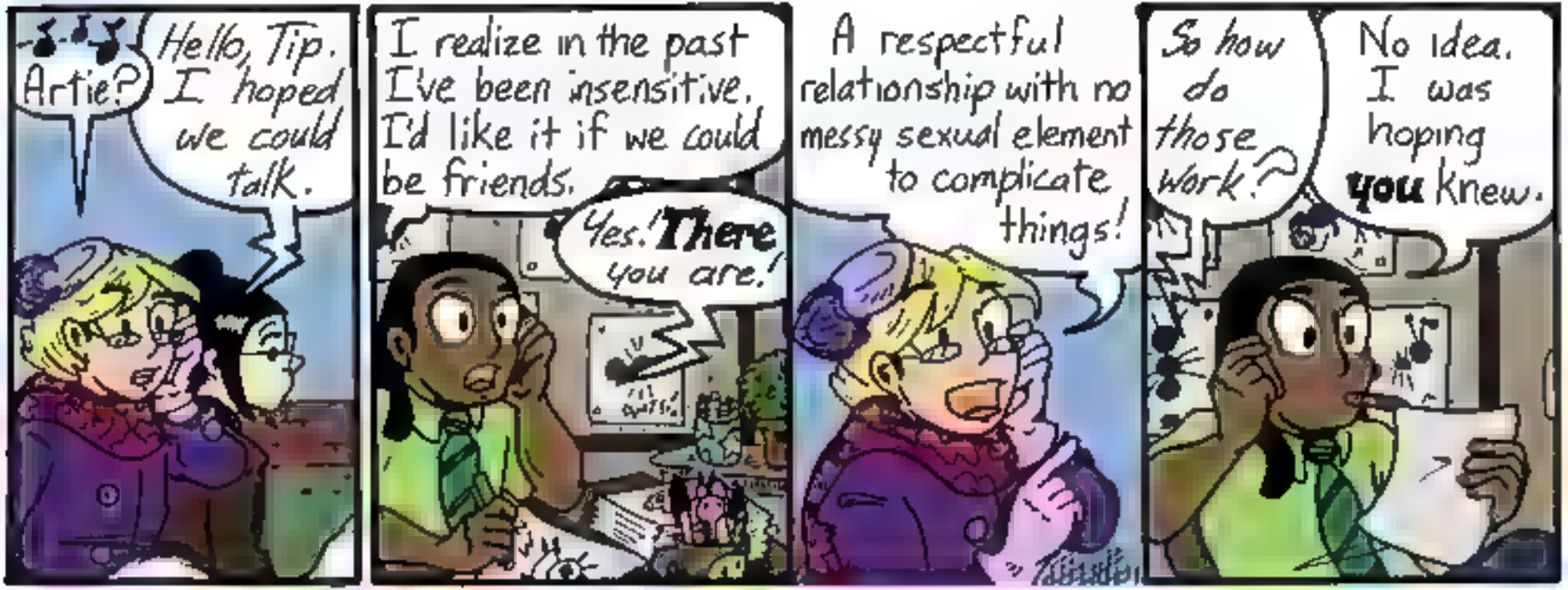

What's next, guys? The night is still young!
I've got class tomorrow.
Not to mention organizing the community to prep for Prop 39.
I have to write a field report.
And I need to cover my tracks from Anasigma... I suppose we should all just go to bed.
Again, I blame the lack of specificity.

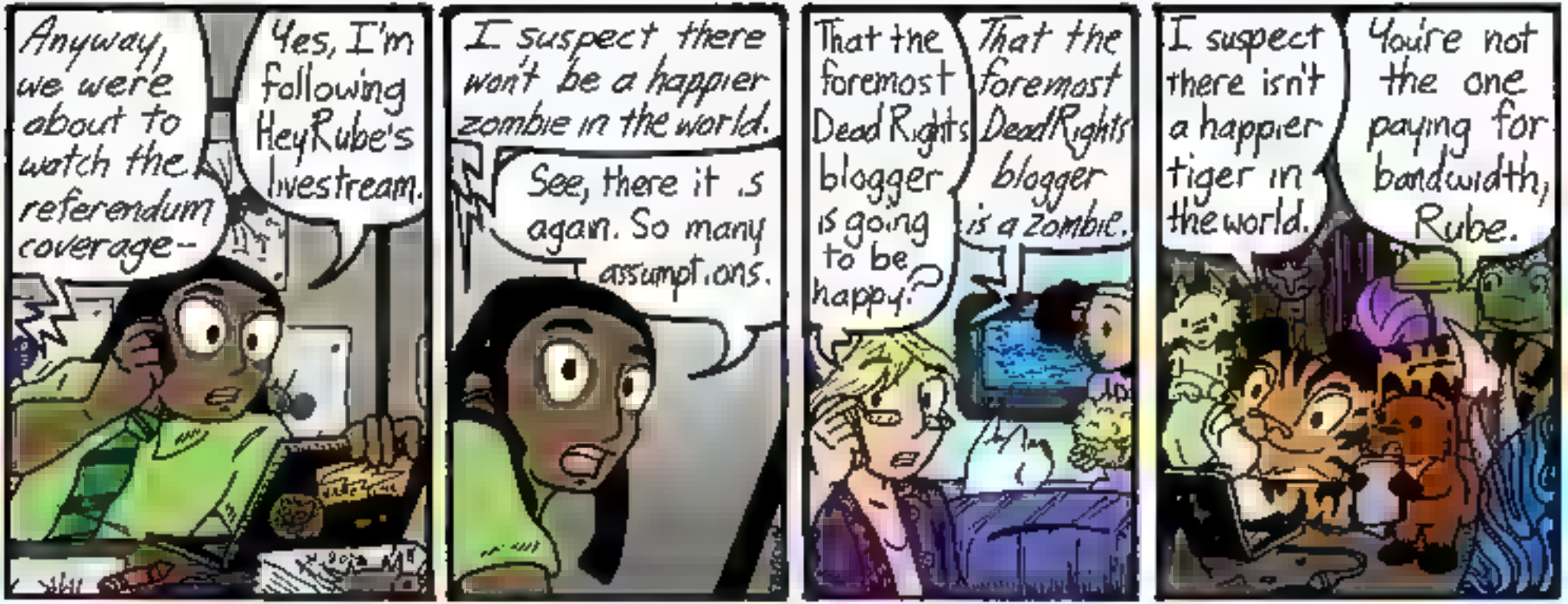
Dethany
As Unity




So... I was right about rooming with Wilkin, huh?
Yes, Nick
He wasn't even into you, right? He was totally **sewing sock** all weekend.
Yes, Nick
Betcha felt like a **casserole** getting stuck with those two.
Yes, Nick, it was **awful** spending a night with Tip and his inhumanly hot, open-minded male lover
Um. Dr Lee?
hee.

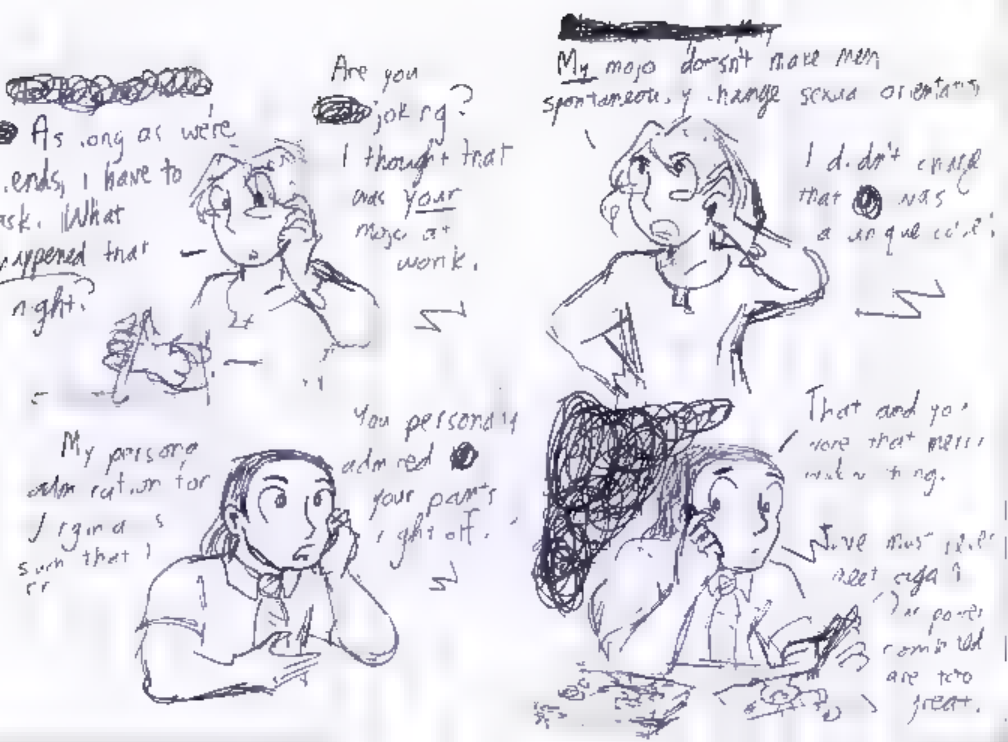

Well, uh, so long, Dr. Lee...
"For thou wast a spirit too delicate To act her earthy and abhorr'd commands..."
Ohhh kay ...
"Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee, By help of her more potent ministers...
"...Into a cloven pine, within which rift Imprison'd, thou didst painfully remain..."
For the record, her earthy commands I'd act.

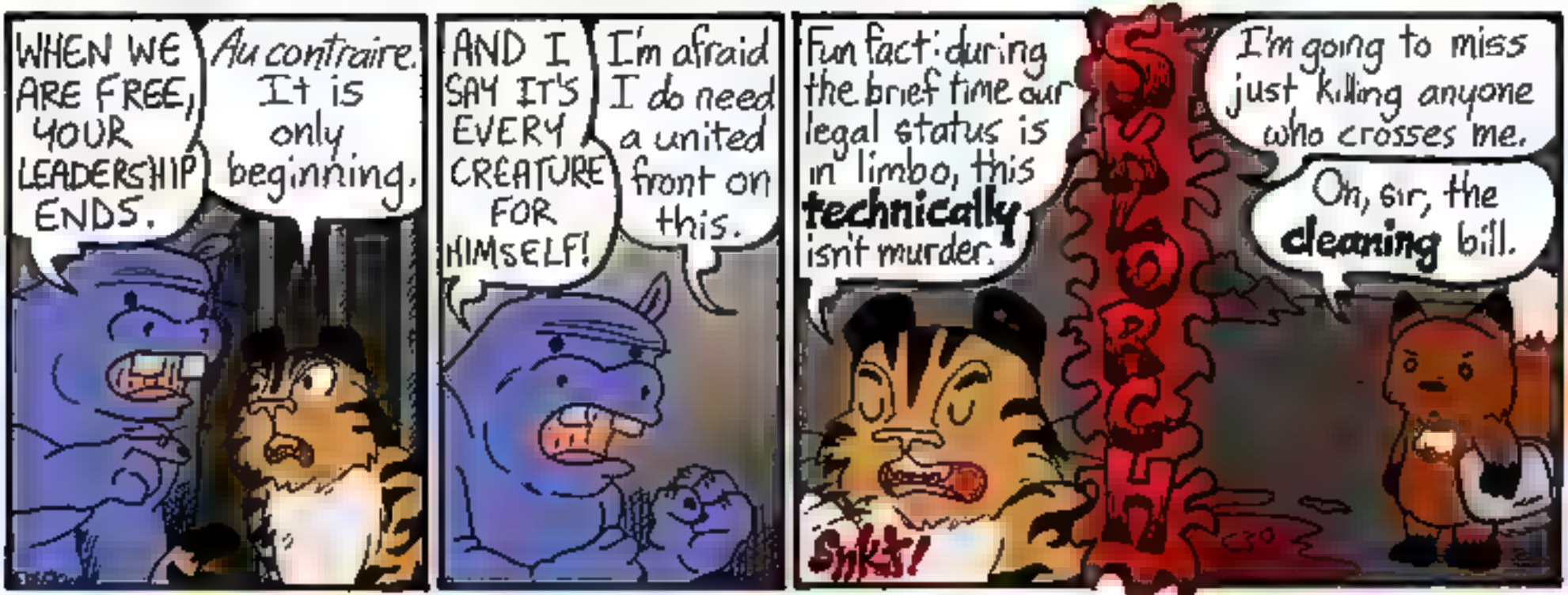

Artie?
Hello, Tip. I hoped we could talk.
I realize in the past I've been insensitive. I'd like it if we could be friends.
Yes! There you are!
A respectful relationship with no messy sexual element to complicate things!
So how do those work?
No idea. I was hoping you knew.

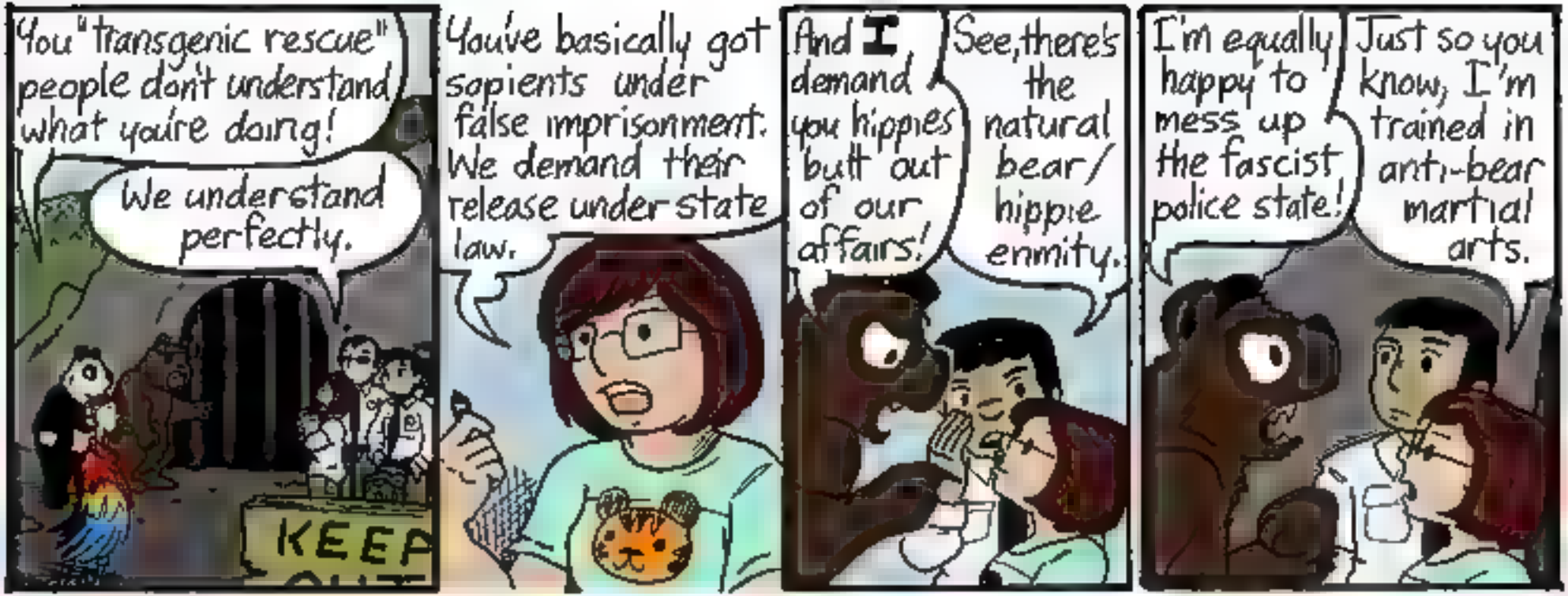

Anyway, we were about to watch the referendum coverage-
Yes, I'm following HeyRube's livestream.
I suspect there won't be a happier zombie in the world.
See, there it is again. So many assumptions.
That the foremost DeadRights blogger is going to be happy?
That the foremost DeadRights blogger is a zombie.
I suspect there isn't a happier tiger in the world.
You're not the one paying for bandwidth, Rube.


The Transgenic League is impotent, Renard. But the Dead are strong and organized.
Uh-huh
The solution? Pose as one of them and lead from the shadows.
Uh-huh.
Now, with this vaguely-worded referendum, we're moments from freedo— what are you doing?
Logging the hours I listen to you monologue for tax purposes.
Can you figure out a way to declare my breath mints?


In a few moments, California law replaces the Transgenic League's "justice," and we walk out as free animals.
THEN WE CRUSH THE HUMANS.
No. We maintain a façade of acquiescence, as per the plan.
WORDS TOO BIG! CRUSH HUMANS!
Yes. We crush them by being perfect gentlecreatures until the time is ripe
THIS COUNTERINTUITIVE DEFINITION OF "CRUSH."
Oh, fine. Crush Renard.
Sir, please.


As long as we're friends, I have to ask. What happened that night.
Are you joking? I thought that was your magic at work.
My personal admiration for Regina is such that I
You personally admired your pants right off.
My magic doesn't make men spontaneously change sexual orientation
I didn't think that was a unique color.
That and you're that man's undoing.
We must never meet again. Our powers combined are too great.

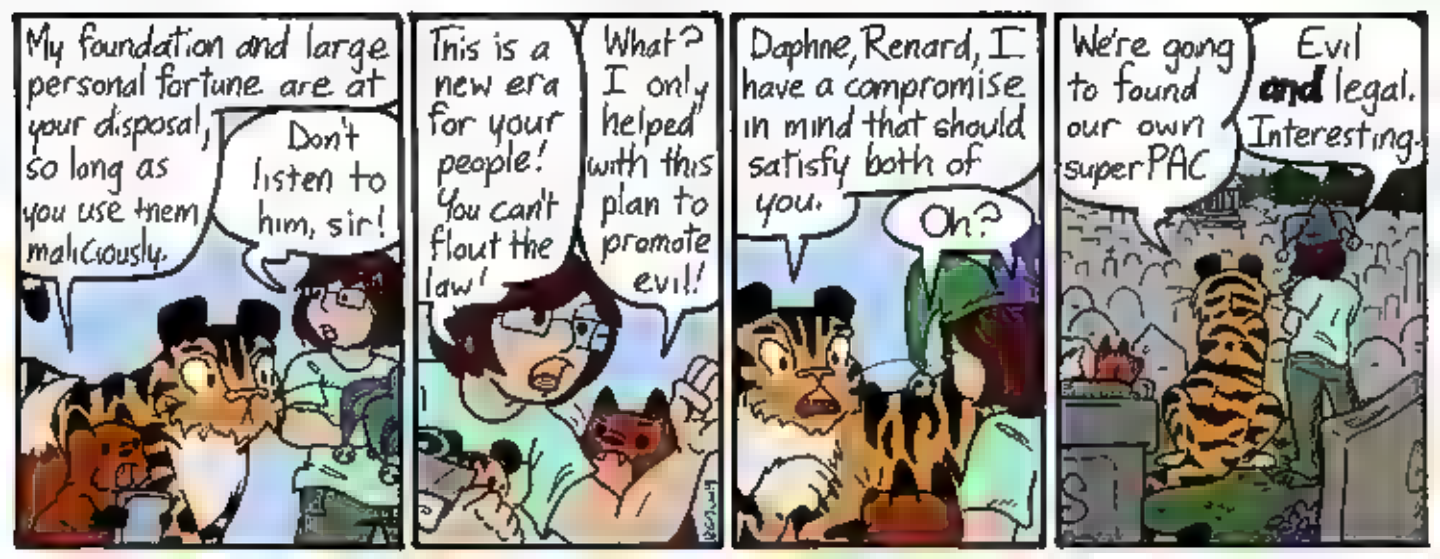

WHEN WE ARE FREE, YOUR LEADERSHIP ENDS.
Au contraire. It is only beginning.
AND I SAY IT'S EVERY CREATURE FOR HIMSELF!
I'm afraid I do need a united front on this.
Fun fact: during the brief time our legal status is in limbo, this technically isn't murder.
Snkt!
SKRCH
I'm going to miss just killing anyone who crosses me.
Oh, sir, the cleaning bill.


You "transgenic rescue" people don't understand what you're doing!
We understand perfectly.
KEEP
You've basically got sapients under false imprisonment. We demand their release under state law.
And I demand you hippies butt out of our affairs!
See, there's the natural bear/hippie enmity.
I'm equally happy to mess up the fascist police state!
Just so you know, I'm trained in anti-bear martial arts.

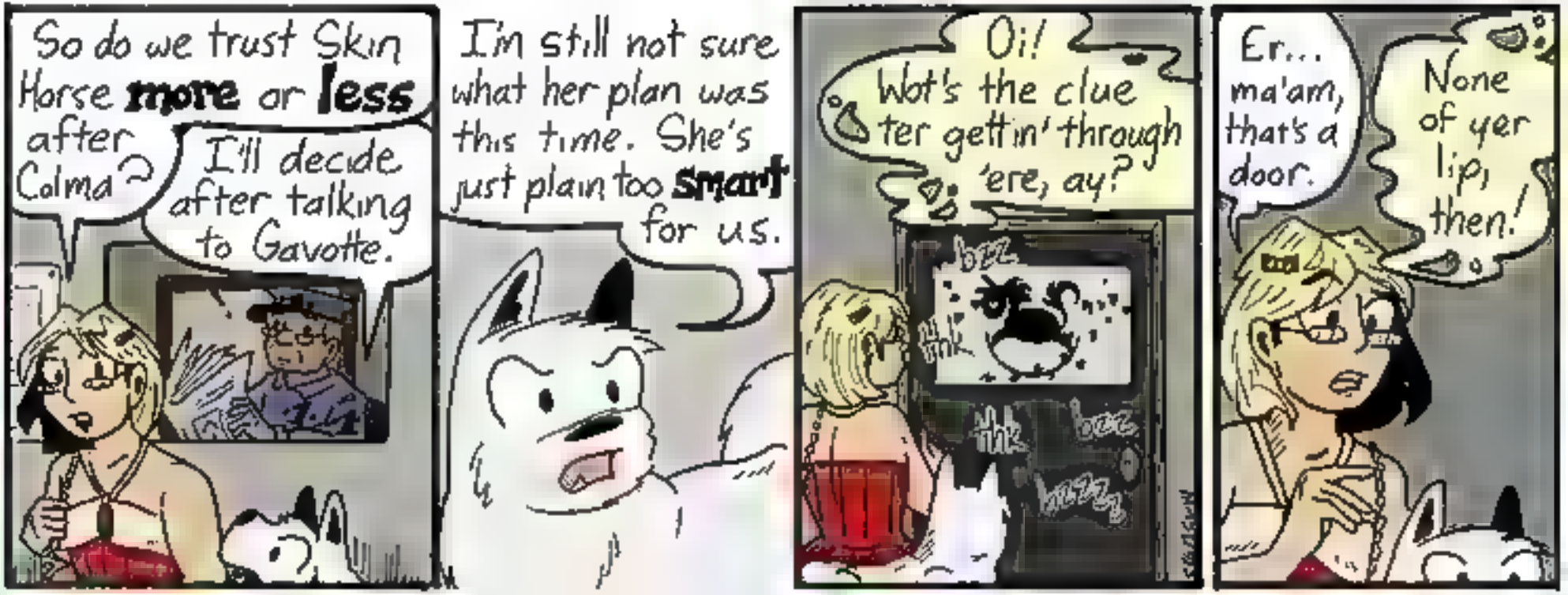

You should be happy! You finally have rights under human law!
Human law isn't prepared to handle transgenic criminals!
If you think we're threatening, wait until you meet our convicts: irrational killers mad for blood!
Why, hello, officers. I hope my ballet tickets haven't quite expired.
Must... kill.. unfamiliar hat monster.
Niue...
And when may I resume my webcomic?


Ooh, I've wanted an excuse to wear this trilby...
Fight it, Niue! Don't give in to your macaw instincts!
kill kill kill
Right...just a hat... sometimes people change their looks and that's okay...
Exactly.
Which is why NOW I'll don this jester cap covered in distressing jingly bells.
ting
DIE DIE HAT DIE
biff
pow
I'll go ahead and call this "unique."

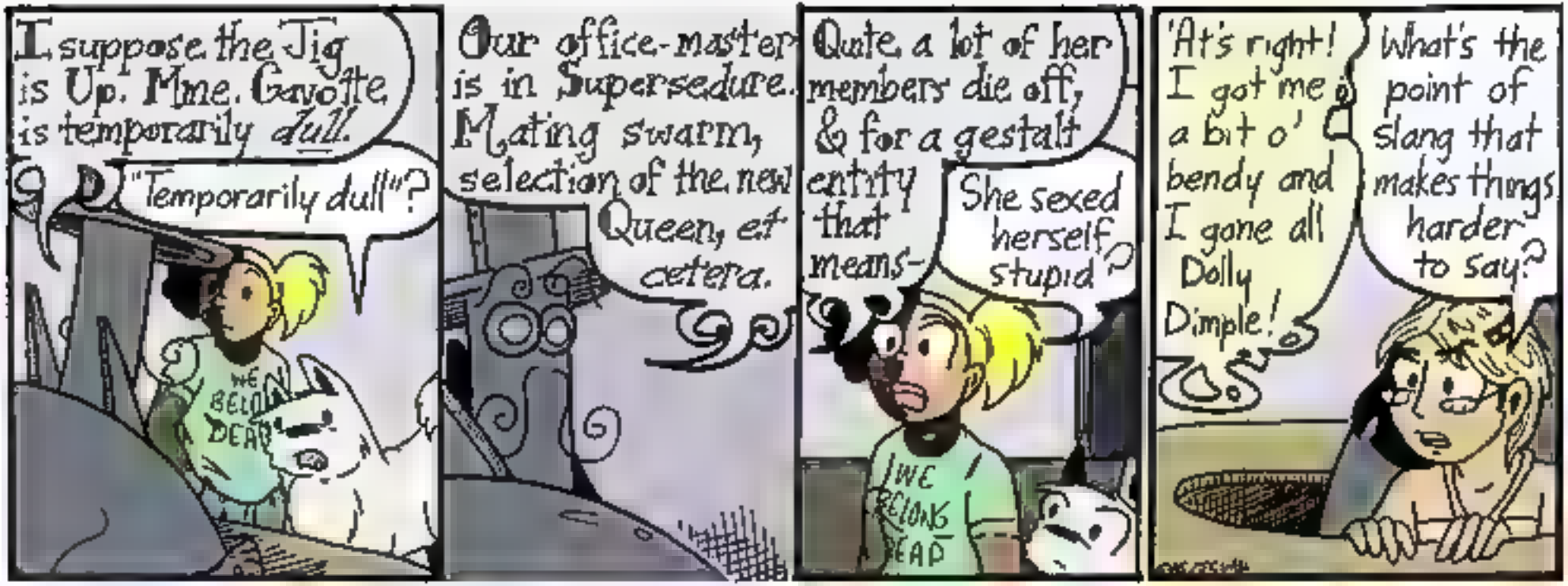

Yow!
GRR
Lim-Lim! No!
SOOMF
Not us, you oafs! Stop that tiger!
Well, this has all been entertaining, but we should get going.
My people have the safe house ready, s.r.
waa
waa
waa
waa

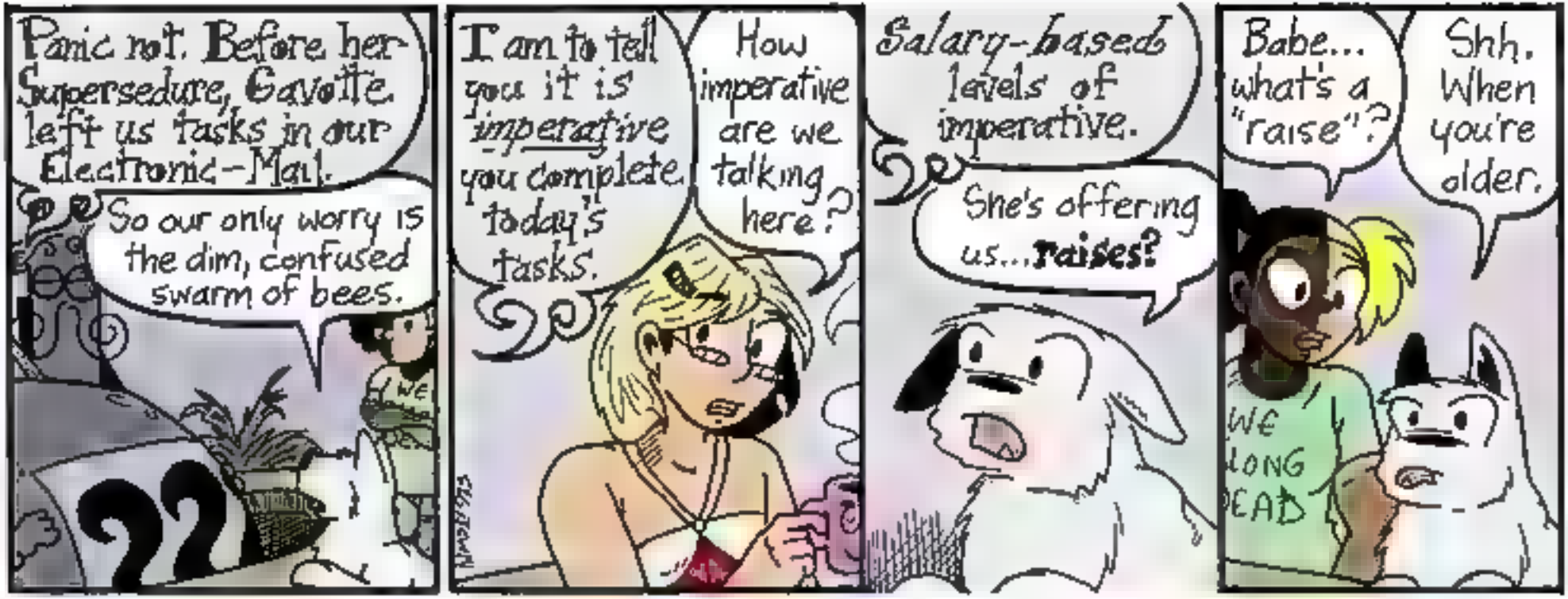

My foundation and large personal fortune are at your disposal, so long as you use them maliciously.
Don't listen to him, sir!
This is a new era for your people! You can't flout the law!
What? I only helped with this plan to promote evil!
Daphne, Renard, I have a compromise in mind that should satisfy both of you.
Oh?
We're going to found our own superPAC
Evil and legal. Interesting.

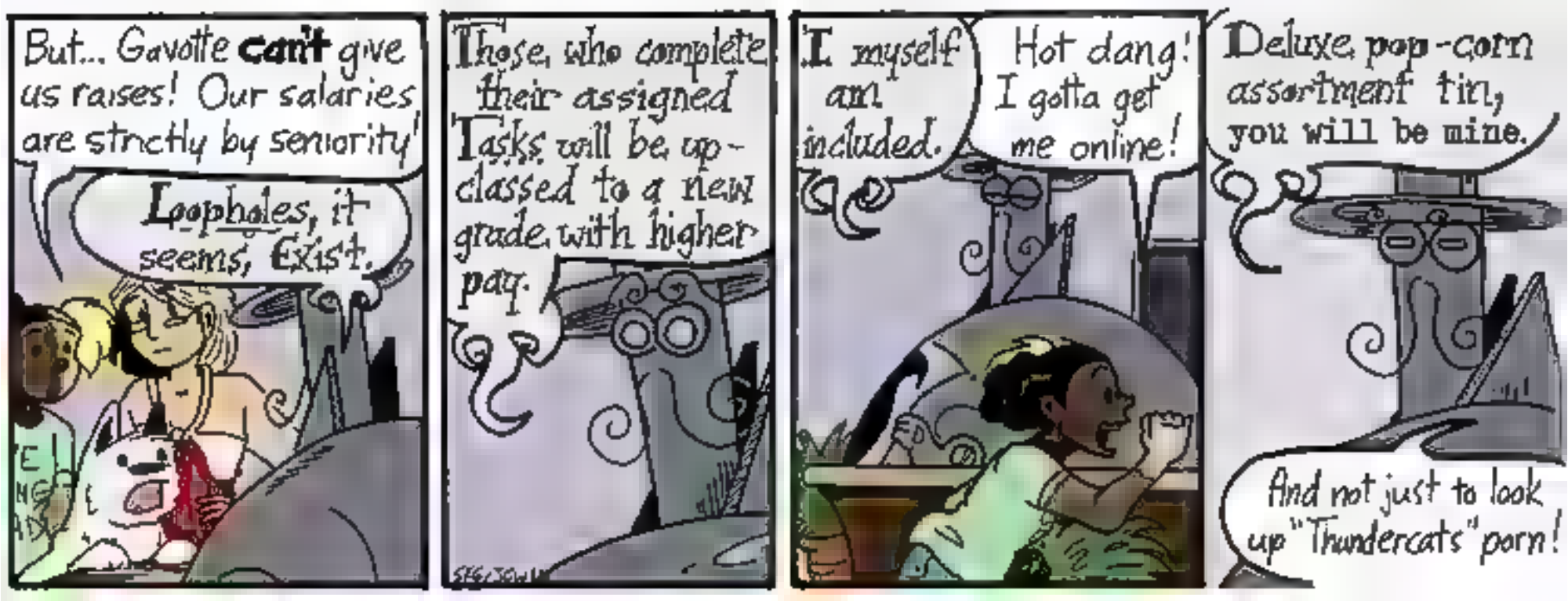



So do we trust Skin Horse more or less after Calma?
I'll decide after talking to Gavotte.
I'm still not sure what her plan was this time. She's just plain too smart for us.
Oi! Wot's the clue ter gettin' through 'ere, ay?
bzz
ink
Er... ma'am, that's a door.
None of yer lip, then!


Uh... Gavotte?
Just need a smidge of help with the bobby! 'Elp a twist out, d'ja be so kind?
bzz
bzz
bzz
bzz
bzz
Wee.
Bzzzz
Thank Heaven, help has arrived.
M, what the heck?
Oh, ahem, you know our Gavotte! She can be... Whimsical!
Ooh, hark at the Ministry of Puttin' on Airs an' huuuUUge metal bloke!
"Whimsical" and "can kill me with stinging" should be mutually exclusive.

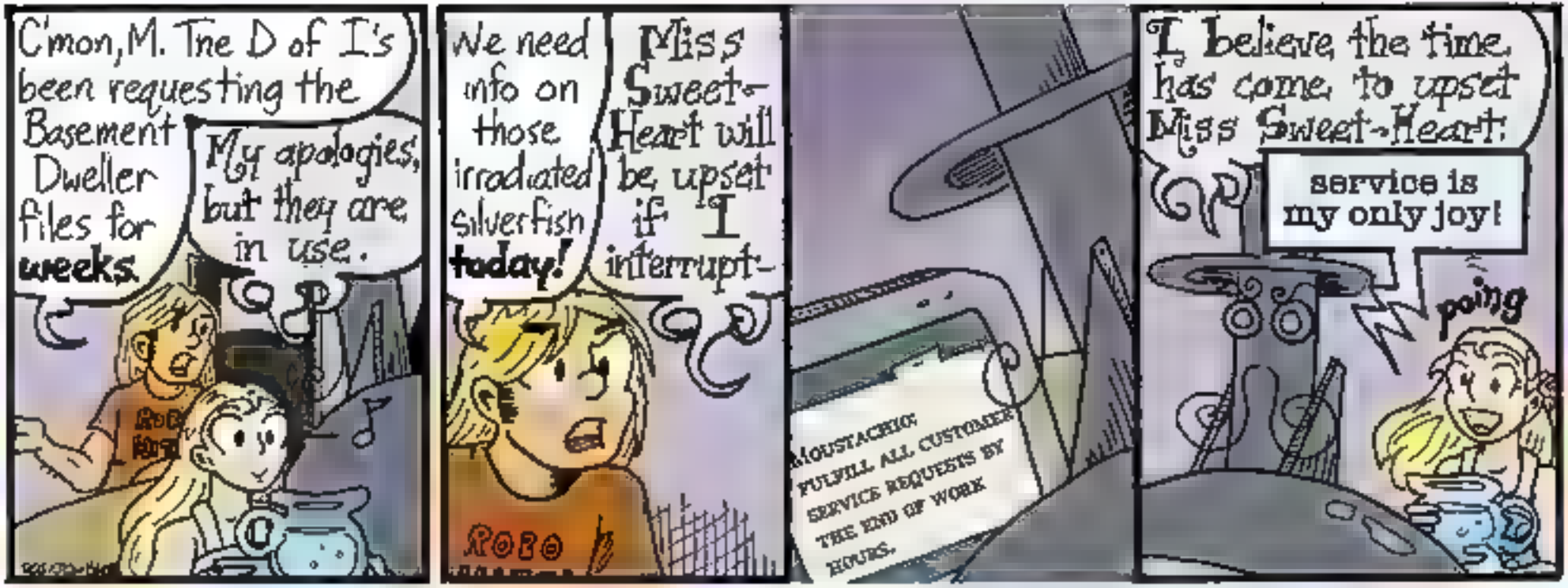

I suppose the Jig is Up. Mme. Gavotte is temporarily dull.
"Temporarily dull"?
WE BELONG DEAD
Our office-master is in Supersedure. Mating swarm, selection of the new Queen, et cetera.
Quite a lot of her members die off, & for a gestalt entity that means-
She sexed herself stupid?
WE BELONG DEAD
'At's right! I got me a bit o' bendy and I gone all Dolly Dimple!
What's the point of slang that makes things harder to say?

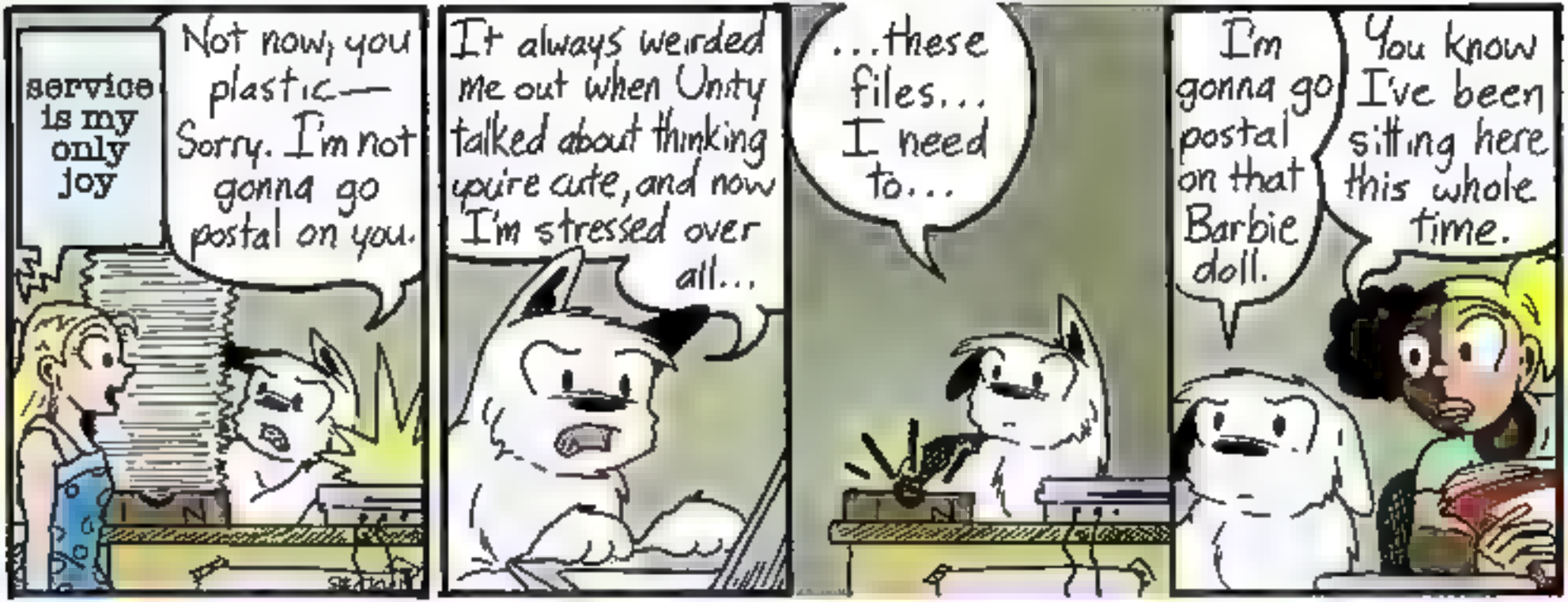

Panic not. Before her Supersedure, Gavotte left us tasks in our Electronic-Mail.
So our only worry is the dim, confused swarm of bees.
I am to tell you it is imperative you complete today's tasks.
How imperative are we talking here?
Salary-based levels of imperative.
She's offering us... raises?
Babe... what's a "raise"?
Shh. When you're older.
WE LONG DEAD


But... Gavotte can't give us raises! Our salaries are strictly by seniority!
Loopholes, it seems, Exist.
Those, who complete their assigned Tasks, will be up-classed to a new grade, with higher pay.
I, myself am included.
Hot dang! I gotta get me online!
Deluxe pop-corn assortment tin, you will be mine.
And not just to look up "Thundercats" porn!

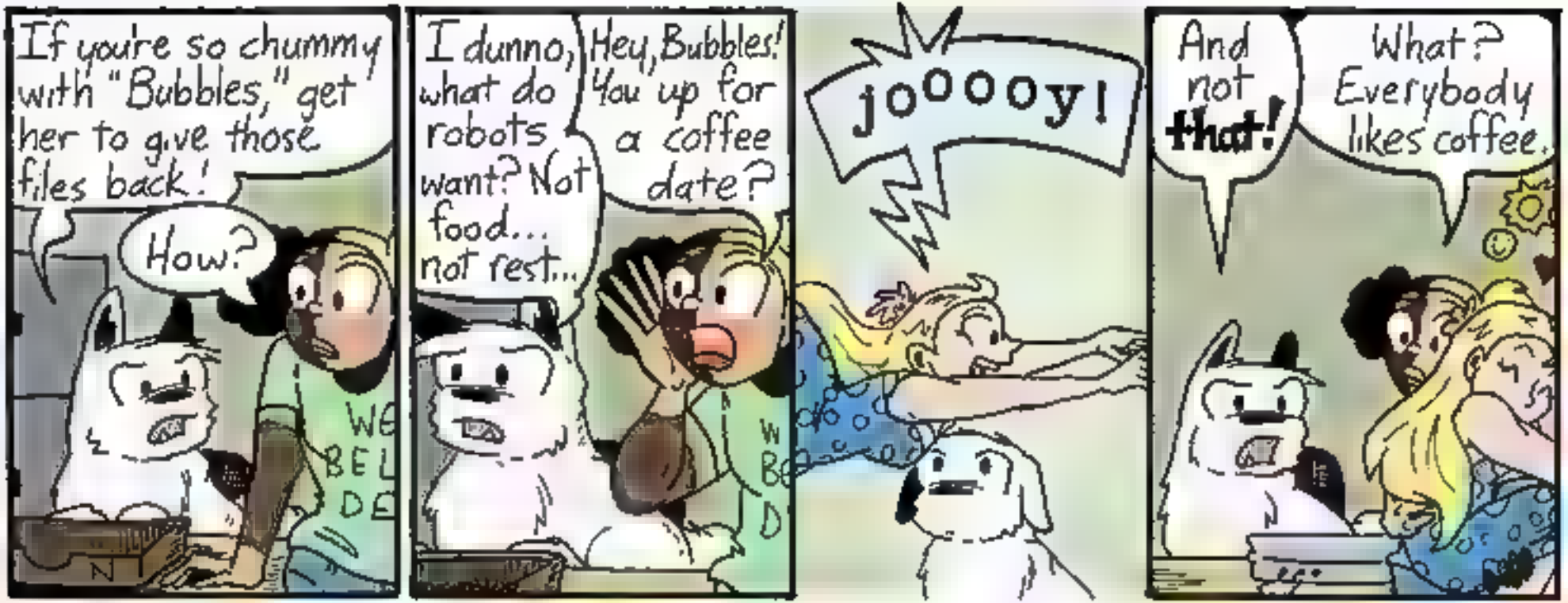

Performance incentives! Finally! Rewarded for old-fashioned hard work!
I'm not just a paper-pushing government drone! Now, what's my assignment?
Sweetheart-
Scan the Basement Dwellers files into digital form, keeping all pages collated.
-Mme. Gavorte
I am a captain of industry!
I'm getting tired just watching you.


Creative team here! We wanted to use this space to announce a special at the Couscous store!
LAWFUL GOOD
Well, you did. I think it's crassly commercial.
From now through the end of June, any purchase of Narbonic and/or Skin Horse books comes with an ORIGINAL DAILY STRIP!
LAWFUL GOOD
Are you sure about this?
You know I have my reasons to goose sales.
LAWFUL GOOD
I just don't want to burden the readers with our personal issues—
Well, I do! That does it! I'm the artist and I'm going for a long shot!
LAWFUL GOOD
LAWFUL GOOD
What? I didn't do it!
It was that little Italian guy you hang out with!
LAWFUL GOOD
Seriously, I told her to just get a parakeet.
Enjoy our comics! Tell your friends! An angry pregnant woman demands it!
LAWFUL GOOD

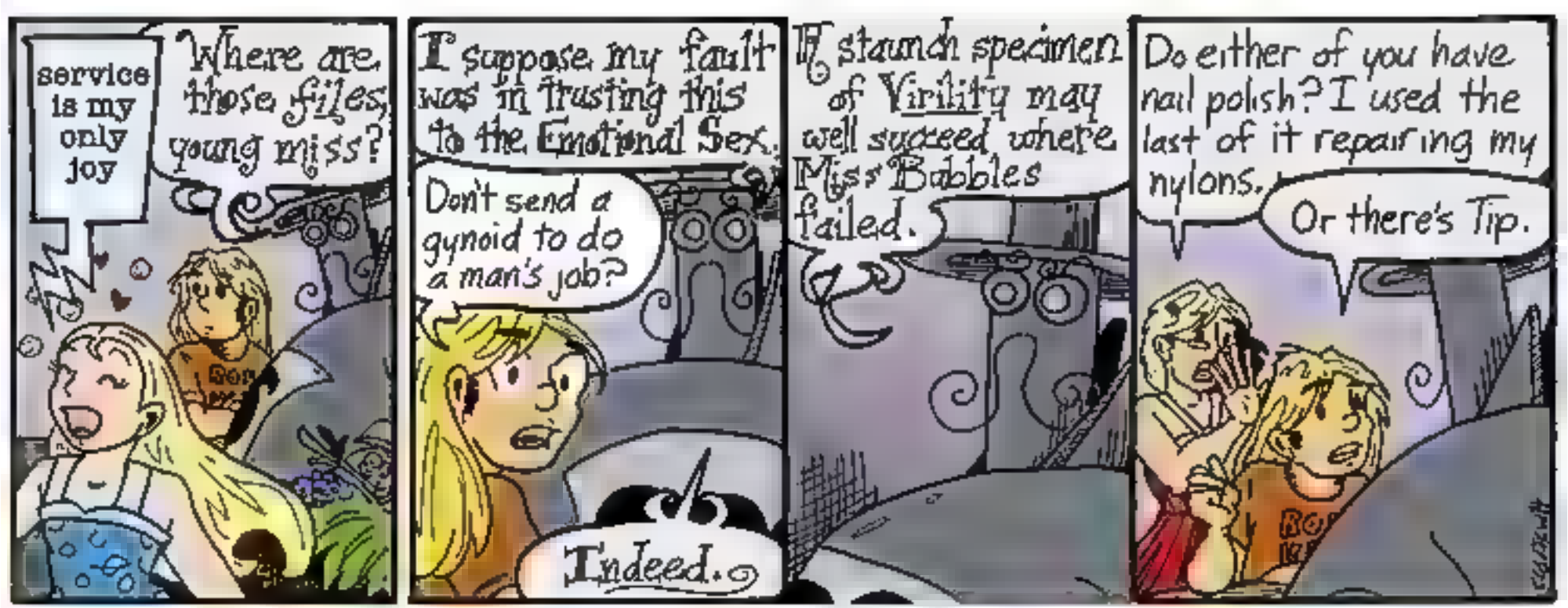

C'mon, M. The D of I's been requesting the Basement Dweller files for weeks.
My apologies, but they are in use.
We need info on those irradiated silverfish today!
Miss Sweet-Heart will be upset if I interrupt-
MOUSTACHIO: FULFILL ALL CUSTOMER SERVICE REQUESTS BY THE END OF WORK HOURS.
I believe the time has come to upset Miss Sweet-Heart.
service is my only joy!
poing

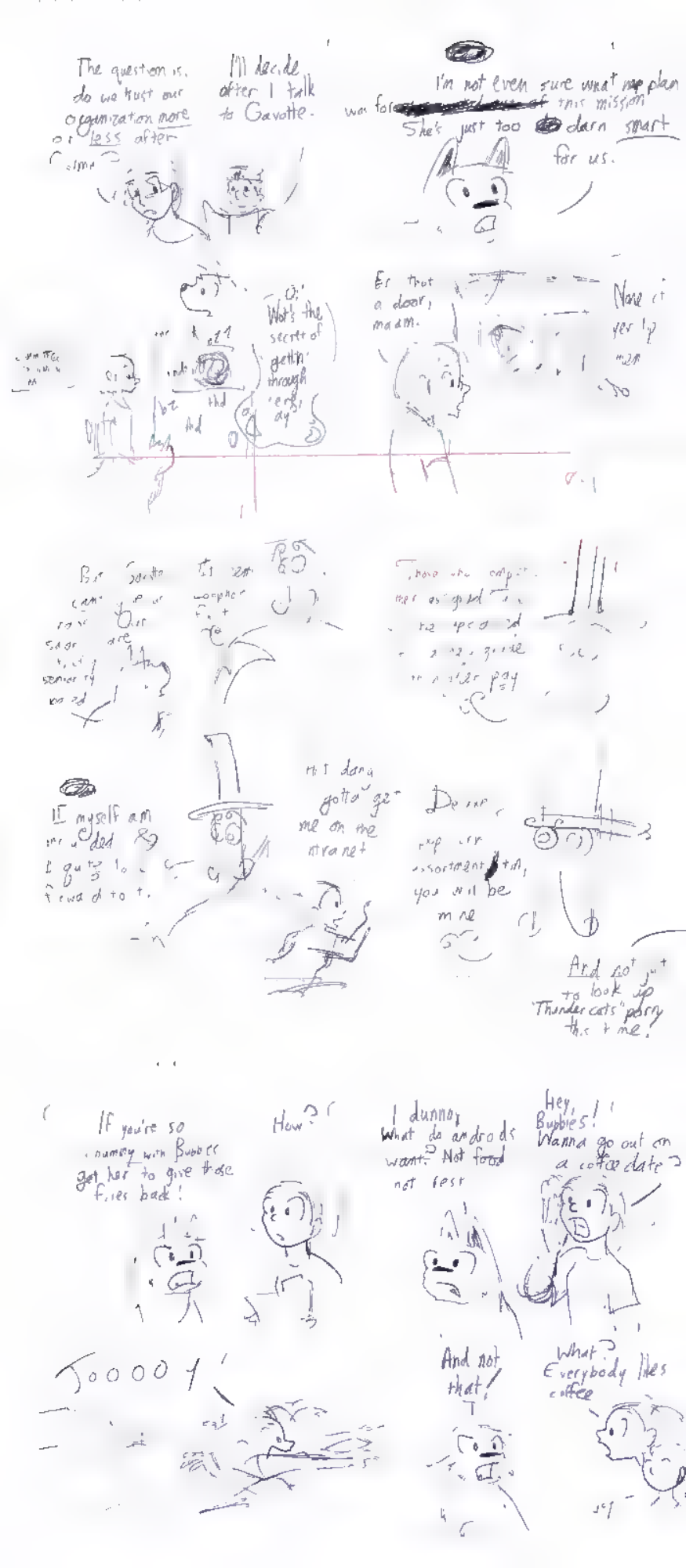

service is my only joy
Not now, you plastic— Sorry. I'm not gonna go postal on you.
It always weirded me out when Unity talked about thinking you're cute, and now I'm stressed over all...
...these files... I need to...
I'm gonna go postal on that Barbie doll.
You know I've been sitting here this whole time.

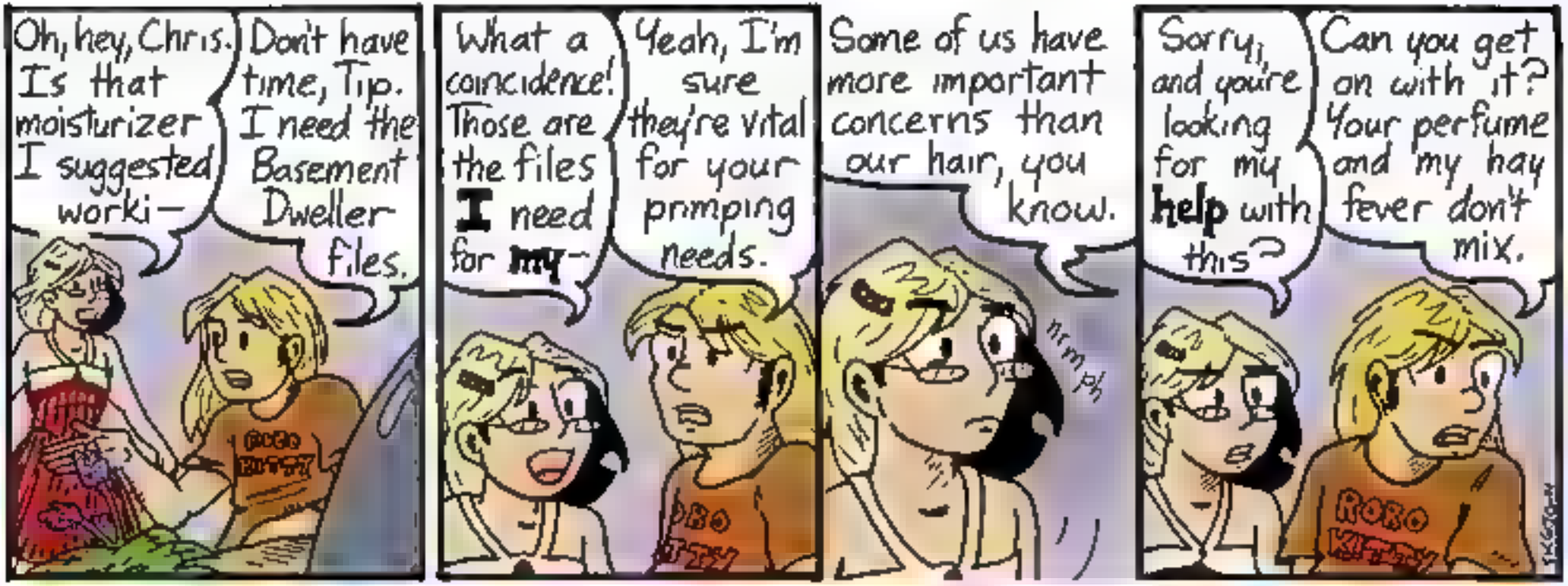

That glorified Brita pitcher just filejacked me!
Bubbles? She must need it for something.
I need the Basement Dwellers files! That's my task! What'll Gavotte say when-
"Bubbles"?
We decided she needed a name!
How do I miss all the important meetings?
Come think, Brita's a nice name for a girl.
WE BELONG

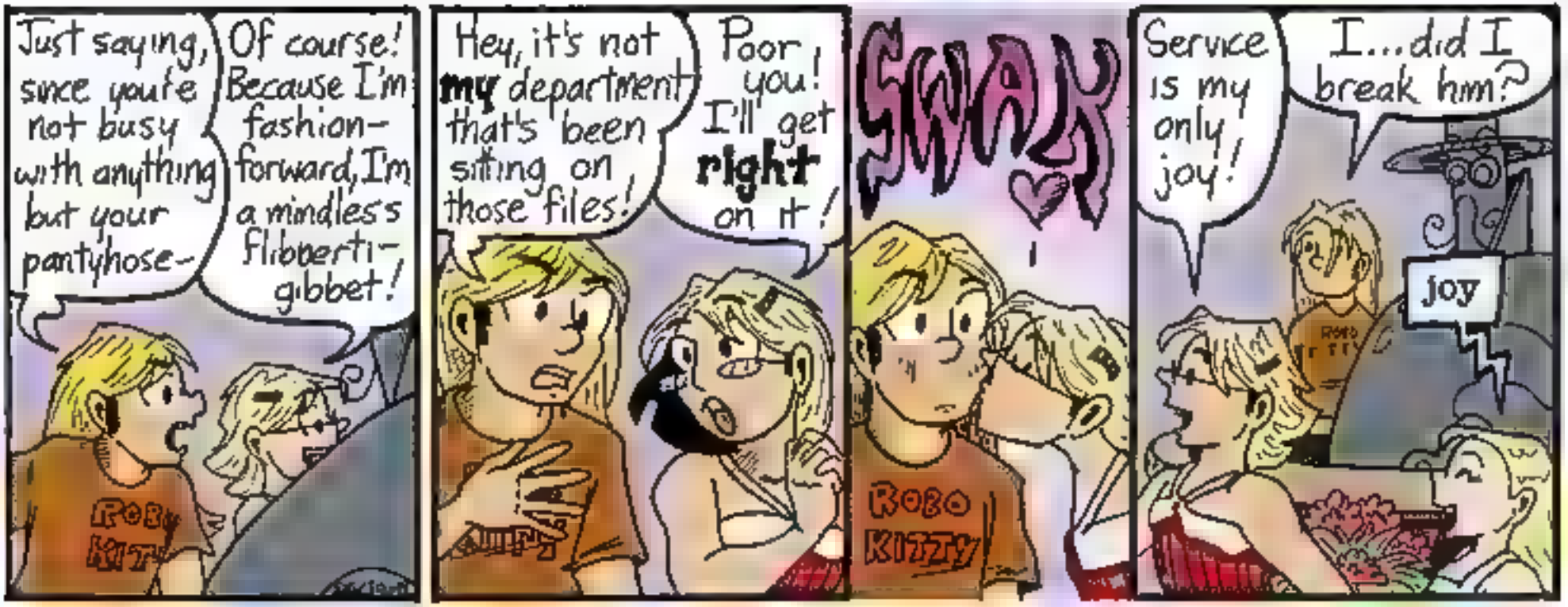

If you're so chummy with "Bubbles," get her to give those files back!
How?
I dunno, what do robots want? Not food... not rest...
Hey, Bubbles! You up for a coffee date?
joooooy!
And not that!
What? Everybody likes coffee.

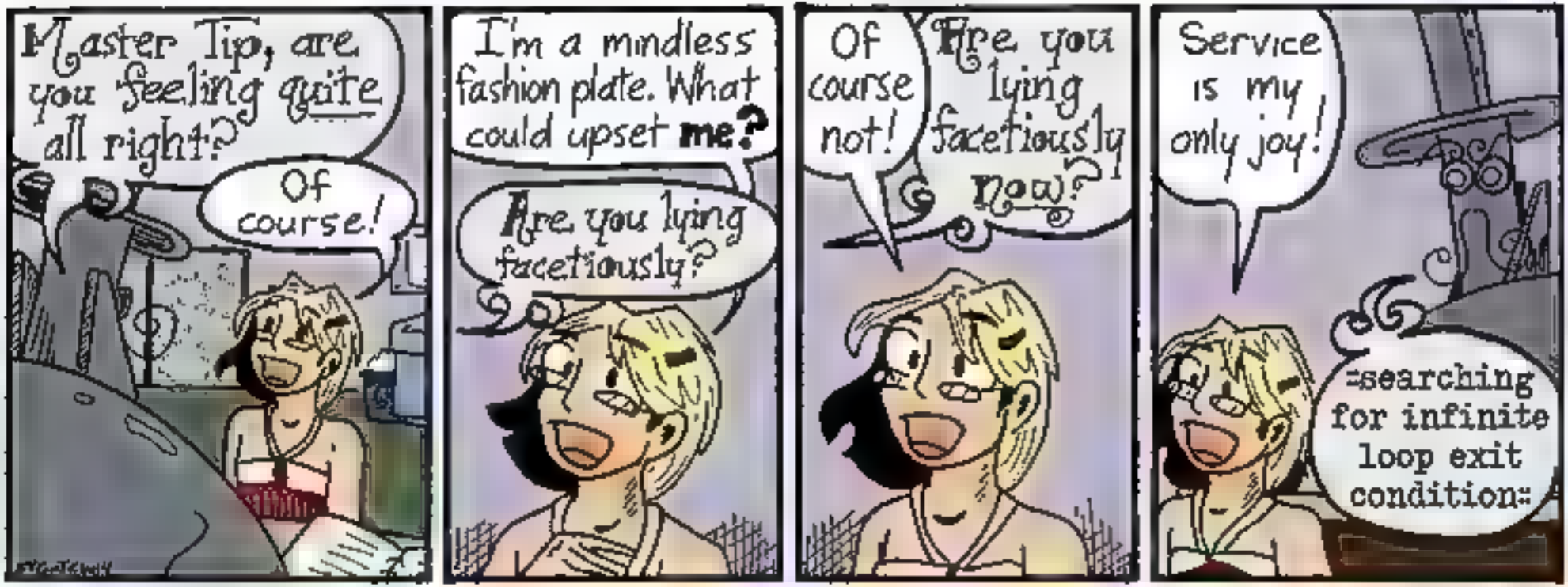

What the heck was that?
Me being smart! I keep Bubbles busy, you steal back those files.
WE BELONG DEAD
What if she takes the date seriously?
Guess I'll wing it. She's cute.
Okay, if you're fine with it, I support your decision to—
Plus I'm really good at kissing.
Be more affected by your lesbian robot date!
You think she shorts out if you kiss her? Because awesome.
WE BELONG

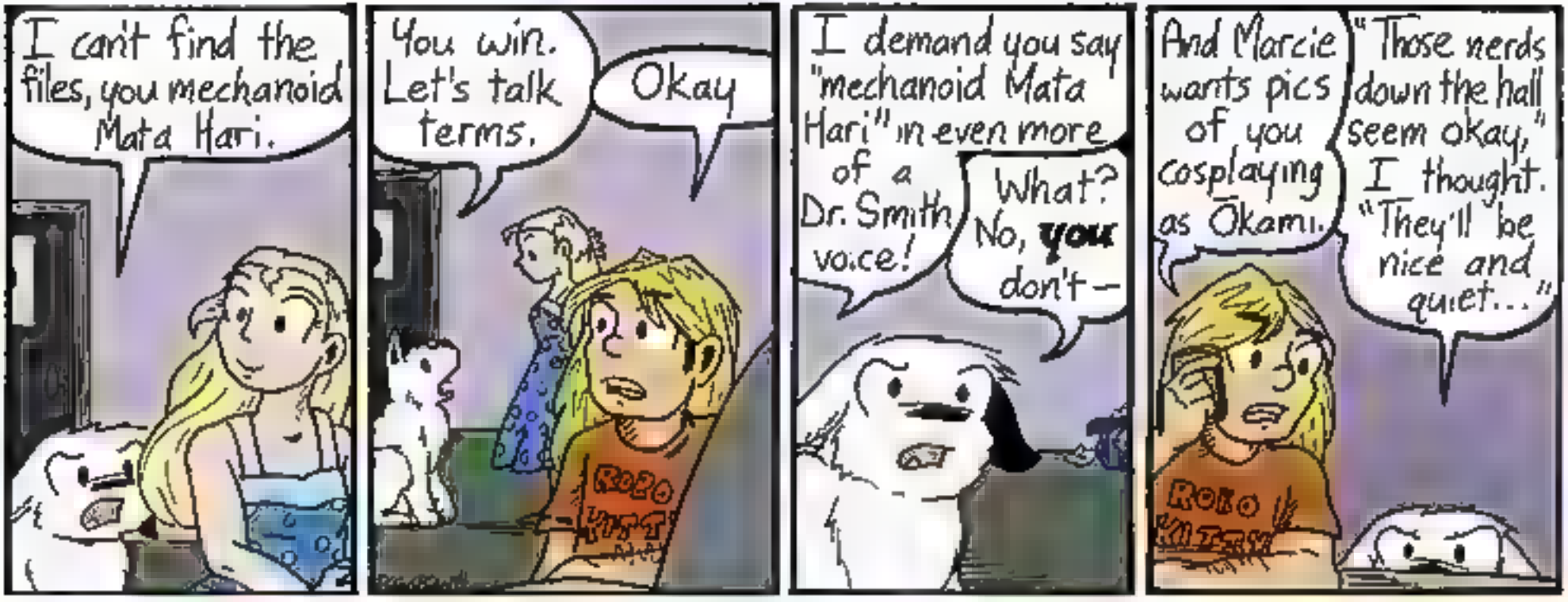

service is my only joy
Where are those files, young miss?
I suppose my fault was in trusting this to the Emotional Sex.
Don't send a gynoid to do a man's job?
Indeed.
If staunch specimen of Virility may well succeed where Miss Babbles failed.
Do either of you have nail polish? I used the last of it repairing my nylons.
Or there's Tip.

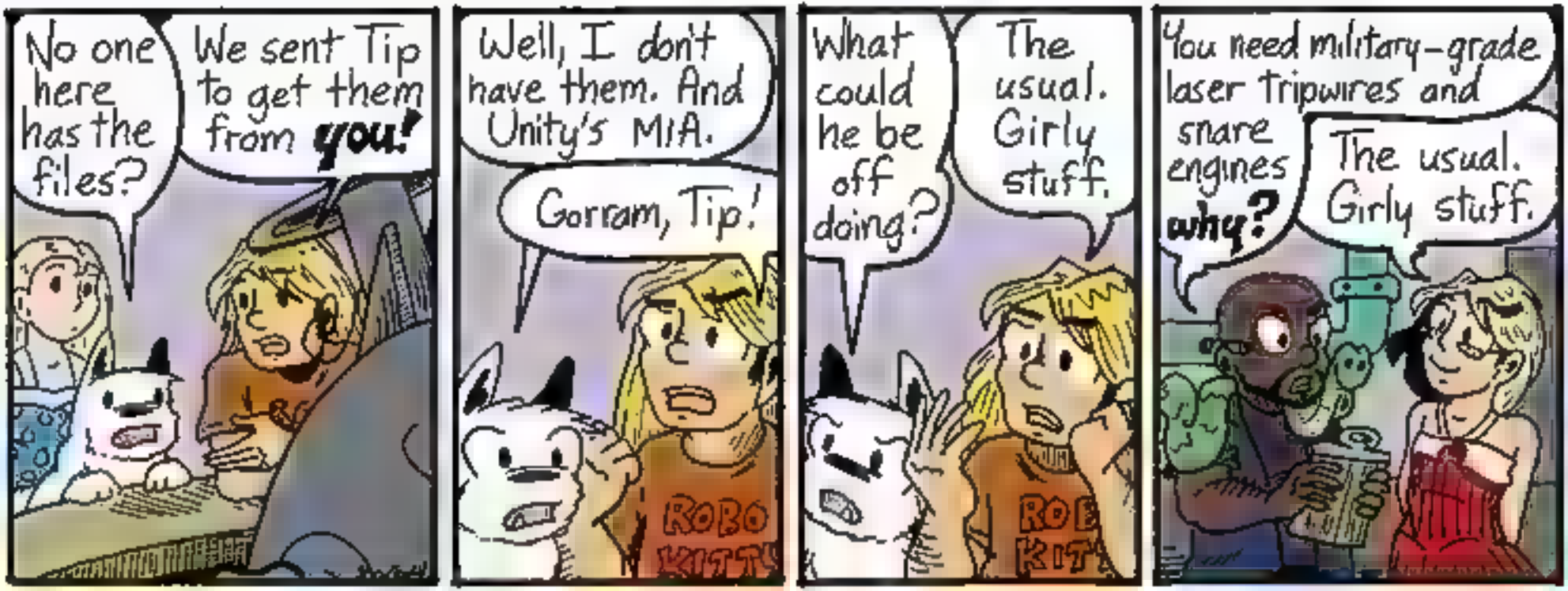

The question is, do we trust our organization more or less after
I'll decide after I talk to Gavotte.
I'm not even sure what my plan was for this mission
She's just too darn smart for us.
Wot's the secret of gettin' through 'eavy, ay
Er that a door, madam.
None of yer lip
But Gavotte
Those who complete
I'll myself am
I gotta go
Hi I dona gotta' ge me on the mranet
De
rup
you will be mine
And not just to look up "Thunder cats" porry this time.
If you're so
Huw?
dummy with Bubbles
get her to give those
fries back!
I dunno, What do androids want? Not food not sex
Hey, Bubbles! Wanna go out on a coffee date?
Jooo!
And not that!
What? Everybody likes coffee

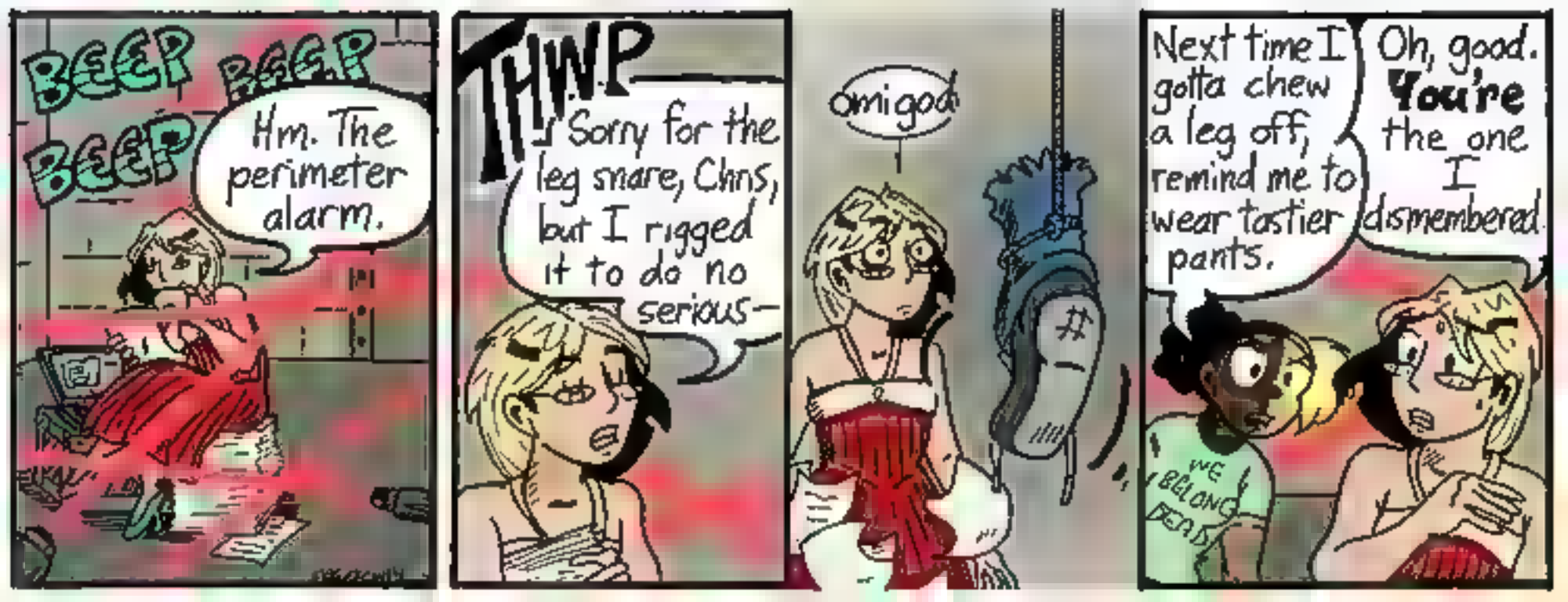

Oh, hey, Chris. Is that moisturizer I suggested worki—
Don't have time, Tip. I need the Basement Dweller files.
What a coincidence! Those are the files I need for my—
Yeah, I'm sure they're vital for your primping needs.
Some of us have more important concerns than our hair, you know.
mmph
Sorry, and you're looking for my help with this?
Can you get on with it? Your perfume and my hay fever don't mix.
ROBO KITTY


Just saying, since you're not busy with anything but your pantyhose-
Of course! Because I'm fashion-forward, I'm a mindless flibberti-gibbet!
Hey, it's not my department that's been sitting on those files!
Poor you! I'll get right on it!
SWAK
Service is my only joy!
I...did I break him?
joy

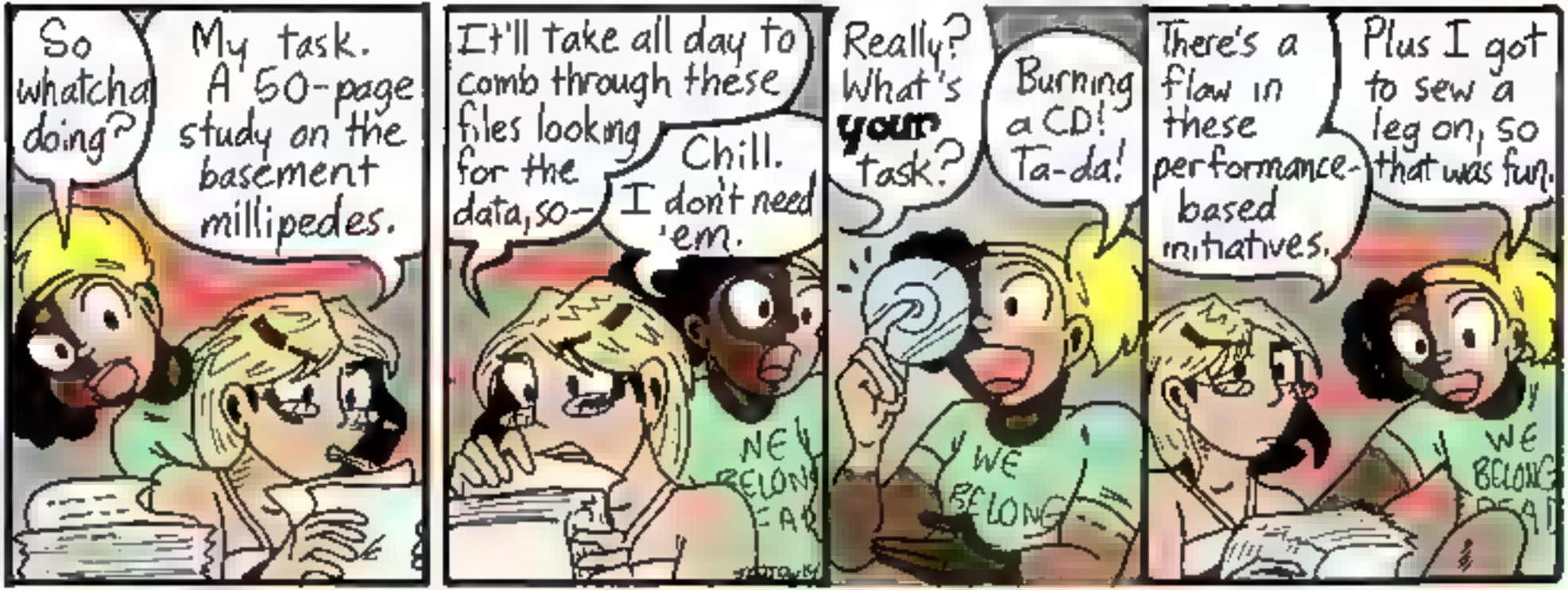

Master Tip, are you feeling quite all right?
Of course!
I'm a mindless fashion plate. What could upset me?
Are you lying facetiously?
Of course not!
Are you lying facetiously now?
Service is my only joy!
=searching for infinite loop exit condition=


I can't find the files, you mechanoid Mata Hari.
You win. Let's talk terms.
Okay
I demand you say "mechanoid Mata Hari" in even more of a Dr. Smith voice!
What? No, you don't—
And Marcie wants pics of you cosplaying as Okami.
"Those nerds down the hall seem okay," I thought. "They'll be nice and quiet..."


No one here has the files?
We sent Tip to get them from you!
Well, I don't have them. And Unity's MIA.
Gorram, Tip!
ROBO KITTY
What could he be off doing?
The usual. Girly stuff.
ROBO KITTY
You need military-grade laser tripwires and snare engines why?
The usual. Girly stuff.


BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
Hm. The perimeter alarm.
THWP
Sorry for the leg snare, Chris, but I rigged it to do no serious—
omigod
Next time I gotta chew a leg off, remind me to wear tastier pants.
Oh, good. You're the one I dismembered.
WE BELONG DEAD



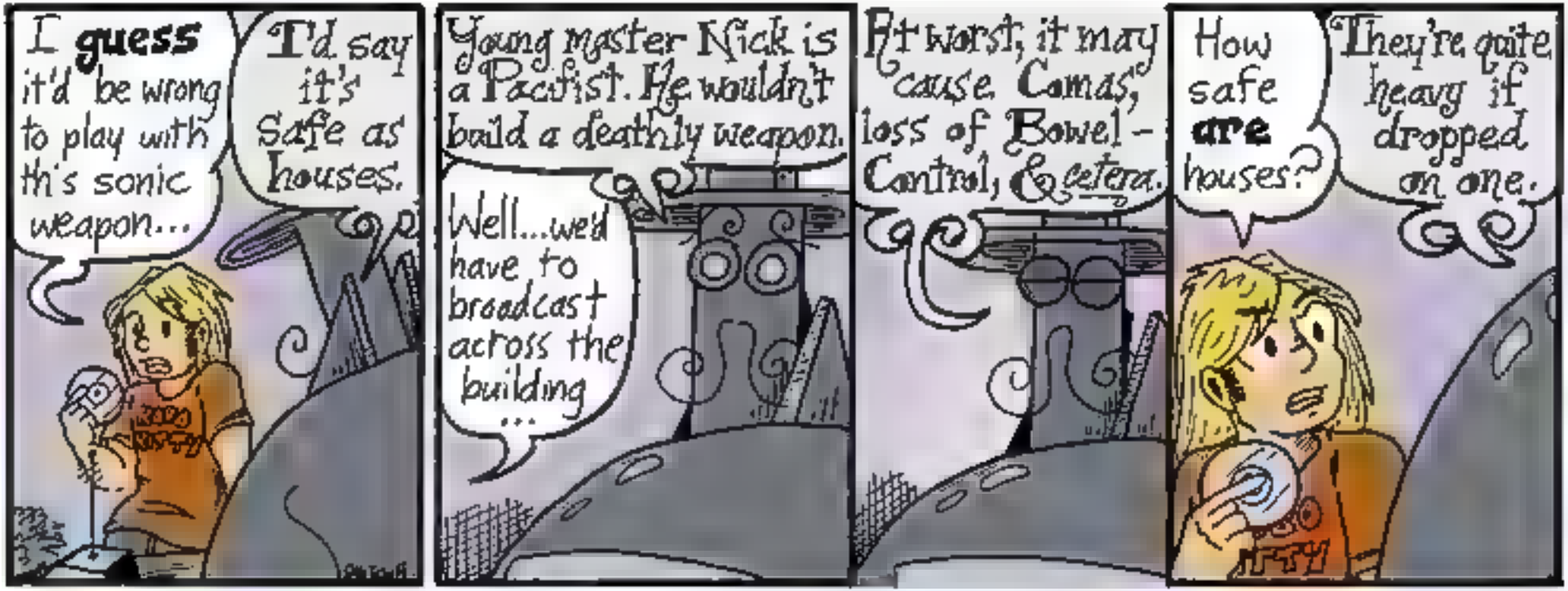

So whatcha doing?
My task. A 50-page study on the basement millipedes.
It'll take all day to comb through these files looking for the data, so—
Chill. I don't need 'em.
Really? What's your task?
Burning a CD! Ta-da!
There's a flaw in these performance-based initiatives.
Plus I got to sew a leg on, so that was fun.
WE BELONG


All right. I propose we join forces and share the files.
Works for me.
Good. Now to get them off Tip.
But his whereabouts are unknown!
That's why you need me. I'll just call on my primal tracking instincts.
Nick! Be my primal tracking instincts for a sec!
Only if you're tracking anime downloads. It's Nick's "Space Dandy" time.

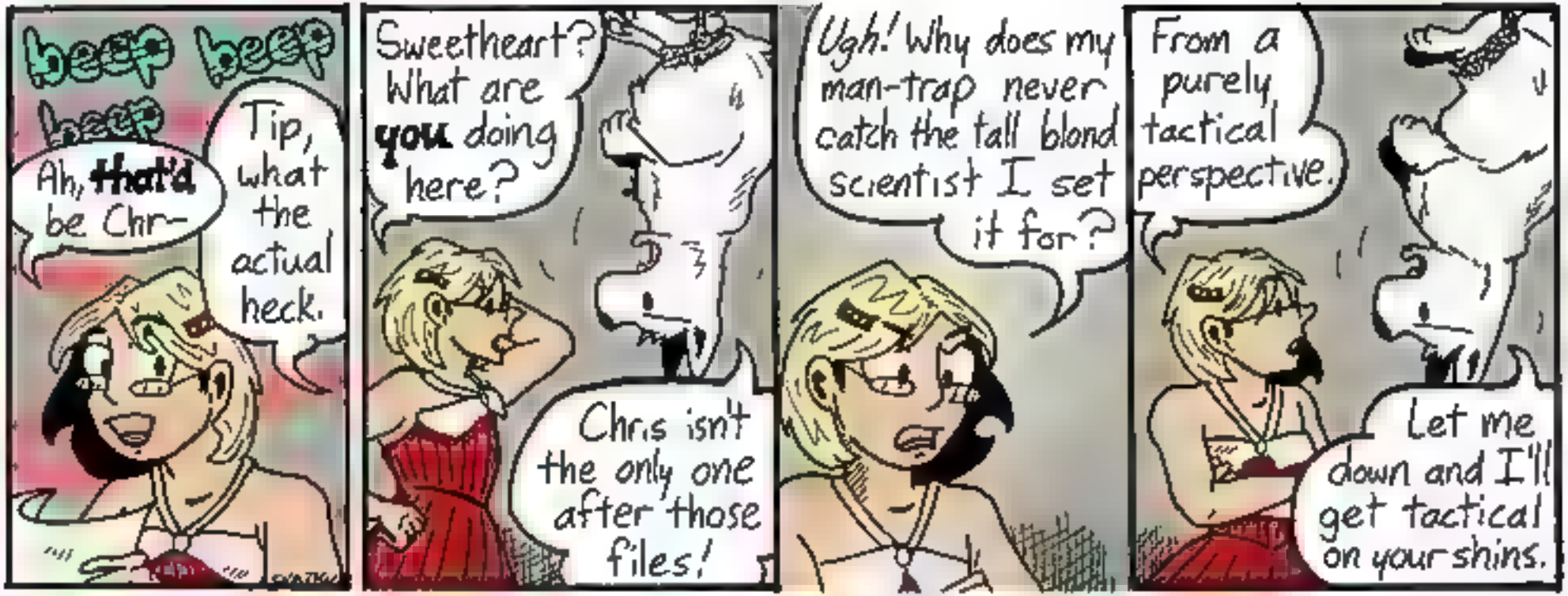

If you're here to wangst, I got plenty of my own and I ain't buying.
No, I need a favor.
Just cuz I can't leave without a flight plan don't make us BFFs.
Just help me find Tip.
Pfft. I should waste processor cycles on this blintz why?
It'll hork him off.
Urge to assist rising ...
You know what I love about this job? The teamwork.

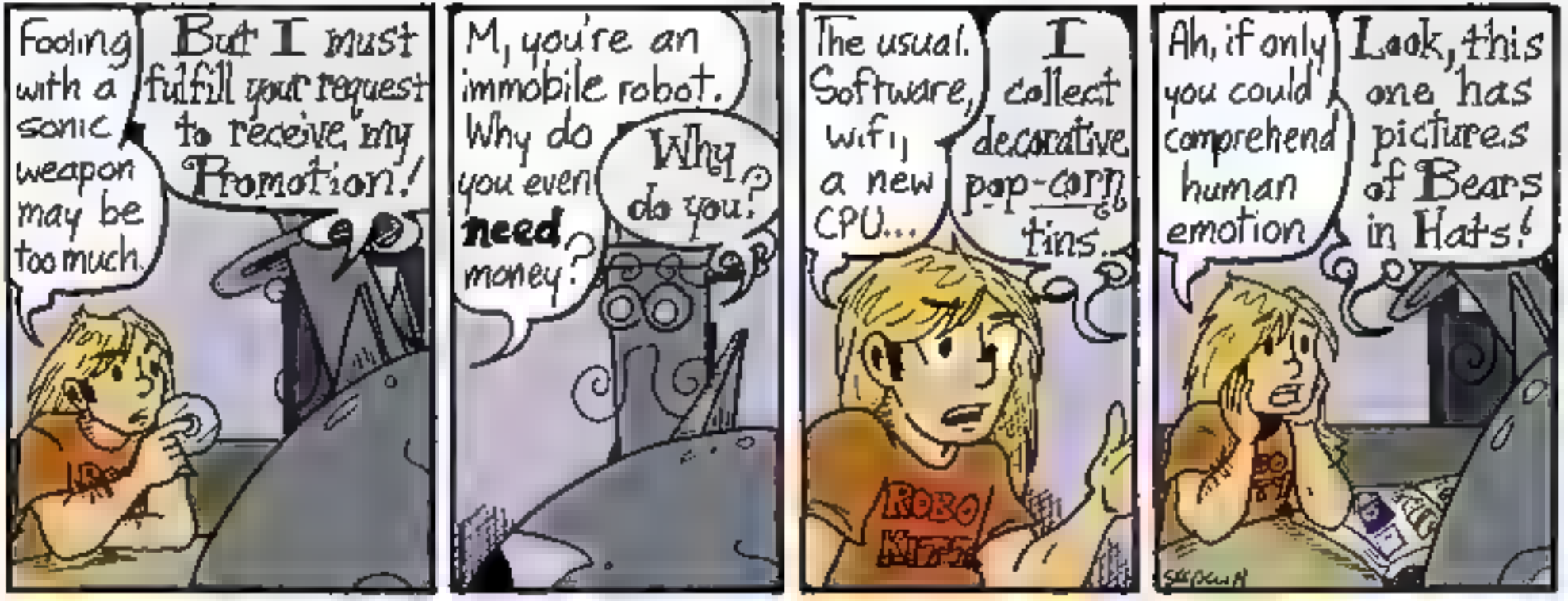

Running a sensor sweep on Annex One now...
While you're at it, see if you can find Unity.
No need, Ace Hart. Ghoulia was just up here collecting my task.
Which was?
To mix up this bio-disabling noise weapon on CD.
Gavotte had you make a weapon and give it to Unity?
Yeah, I was kinda worried until I remembered I hate everybody.
I'll look into this the instant I secure my raise.

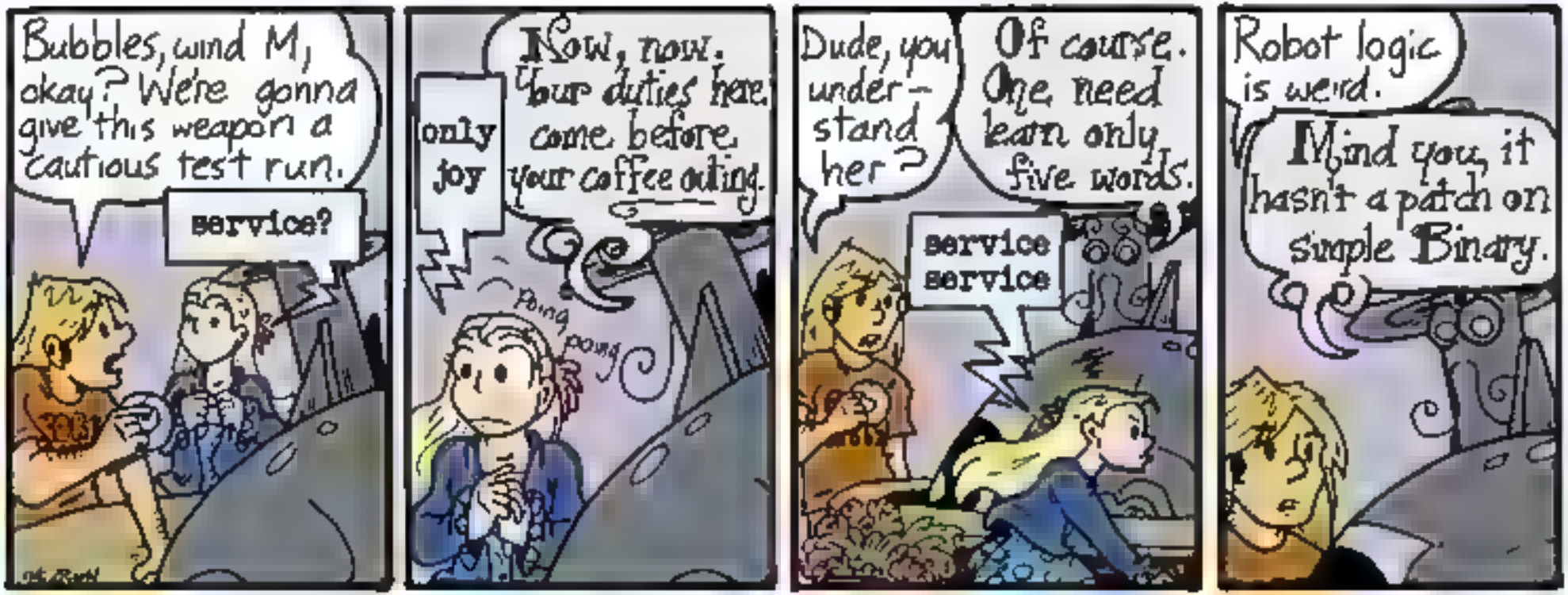

I got a fix on Tip. He's bunkered down in Stairwell A.
Cool, Sweetheart. Fetch me that file
ROBO KITTY
Will do. Just as soon as I'm done scanning it.
What? That wasn't the deal!
I said we'd share. And I'm sharing first.
Kik
Dammit, why isn't there a way to kill people over intercom?
ROBO KITTY
Hey dudes. Gonna set my long-distance sound weapon down here, 'kay?
If you weren't a pile of corpse parts I'd kiss you.
ROBO KITTY

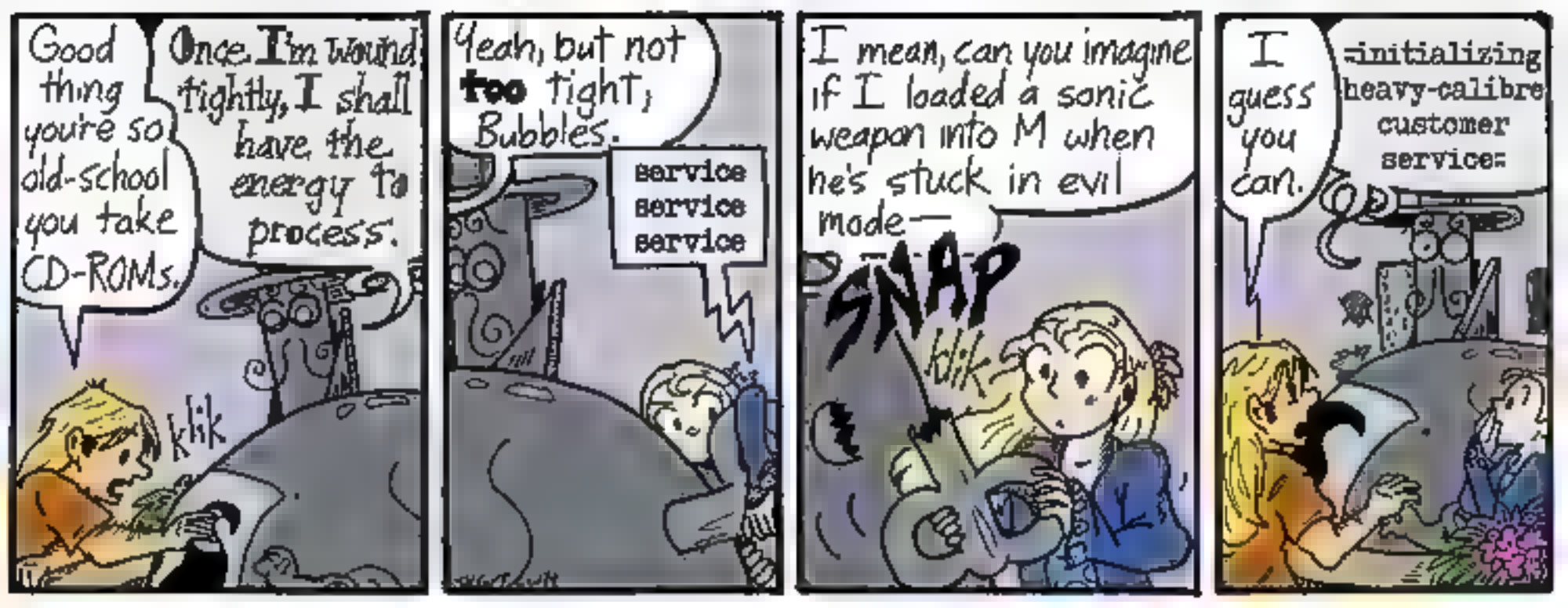

I guess it'd be wrong to play with th's sonic weapon...
I'd say it's Safe as houses.
Young master Nick is a Pacifist. He wouldn't build a deathly weapon.
Well...we'd have to broadcast across the building...
At worst, it may cause Comas, loss of Bowel-Control, & cetera.
How safe are houses?
They're quite heavy if dropped on one.

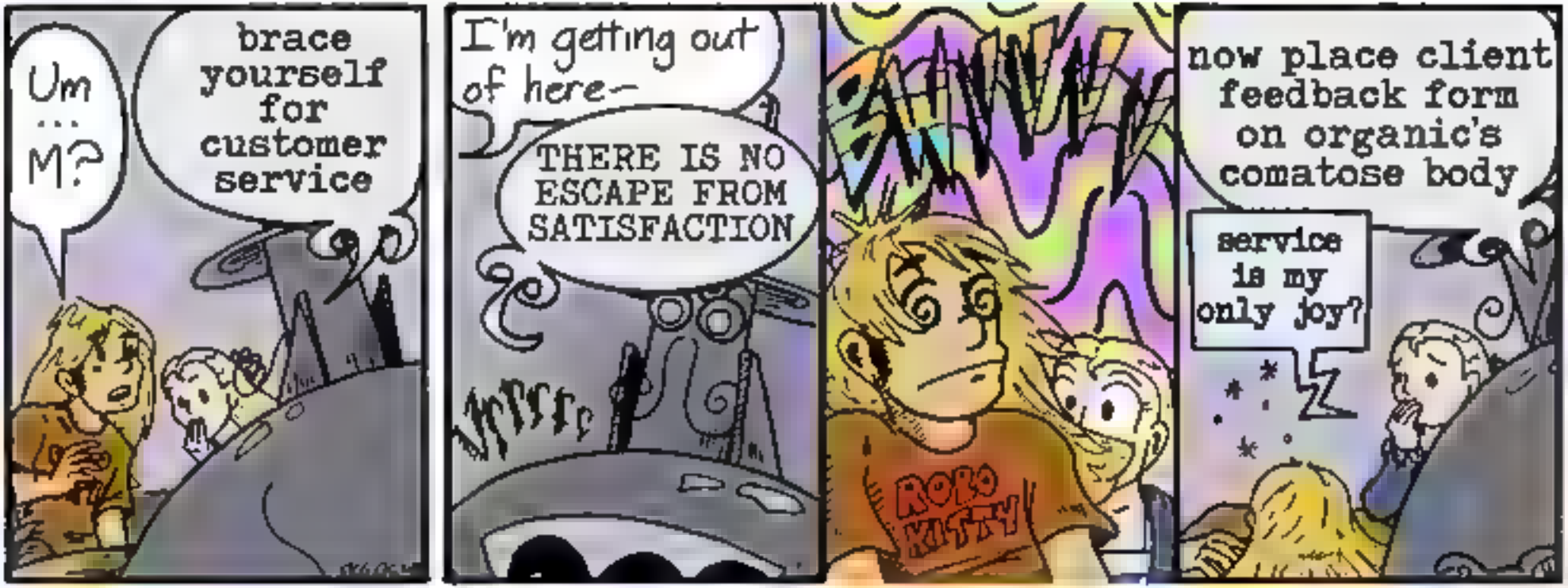

Does it have to be on fire?

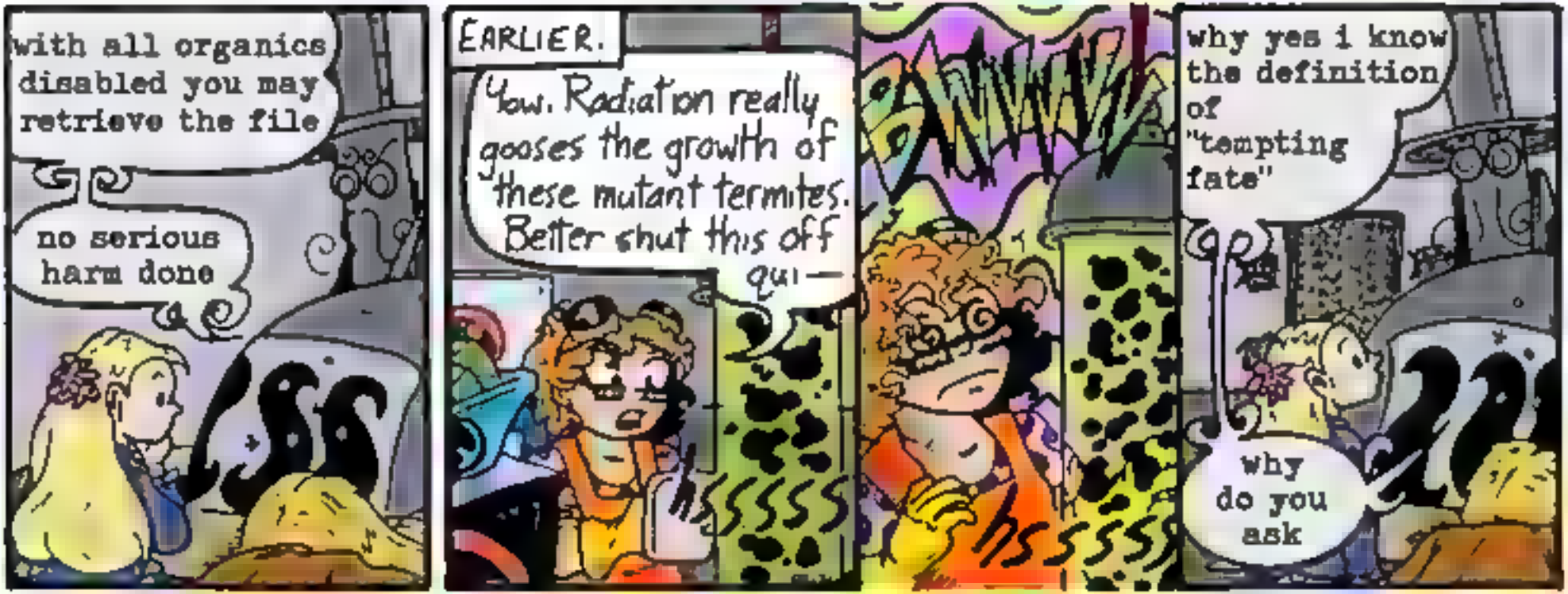

beep beep
beep
Ah, that'd be Chr-
Tip, what the actual heck.
Sweetheart? What are you doing here?
Chris isn't the only one after those files!
Ugh! Why does my man-trap never catch the tall blond scientist I set it for?
From a purely tactical perspective.
Let me down and I'll get tactical on your shins.

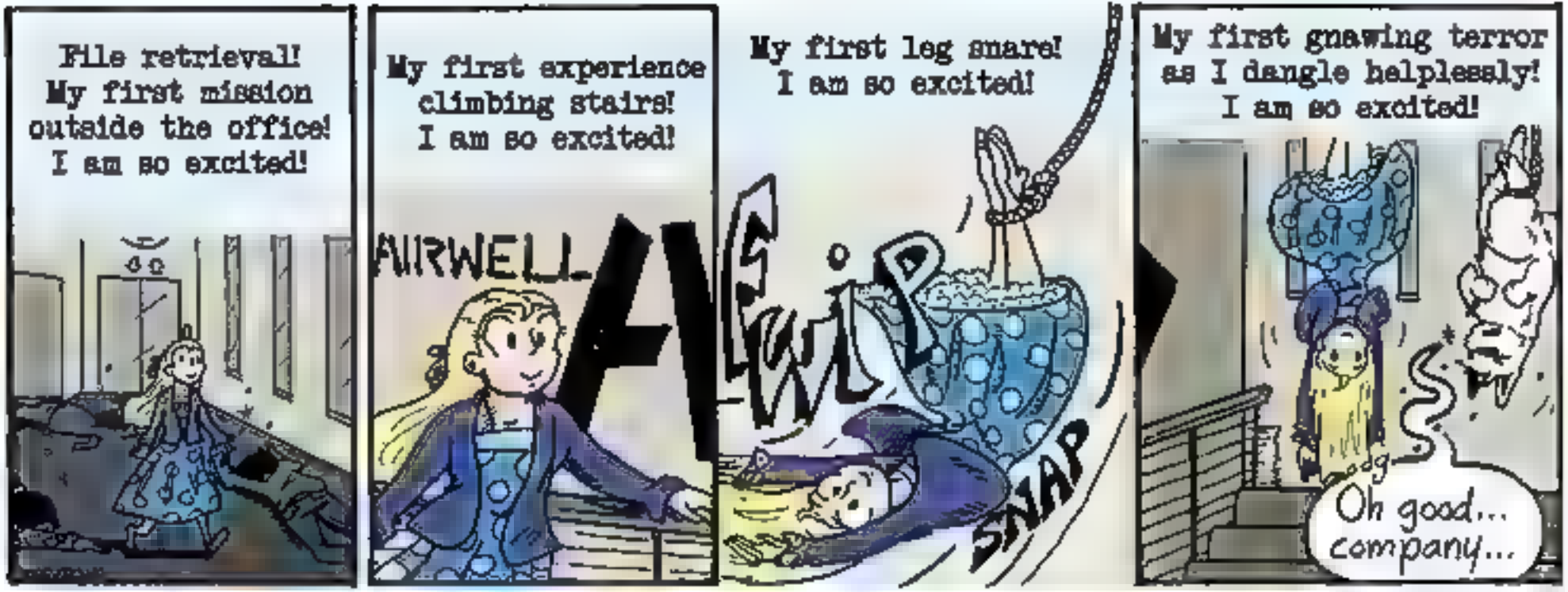

Fooling with a sonic weapon may be too much.
But I must fulfill your request to receive my Promotion!
M, you're an immobile robot. Why do you even need money?
Why do you?
The usual. Software, wifi, a new CPU...
I collect decorative pop-corn tins.
ROBO KITTY
Ah, if only you could comprehend human emotion
Look, this one has pictures of Bears in Hats!

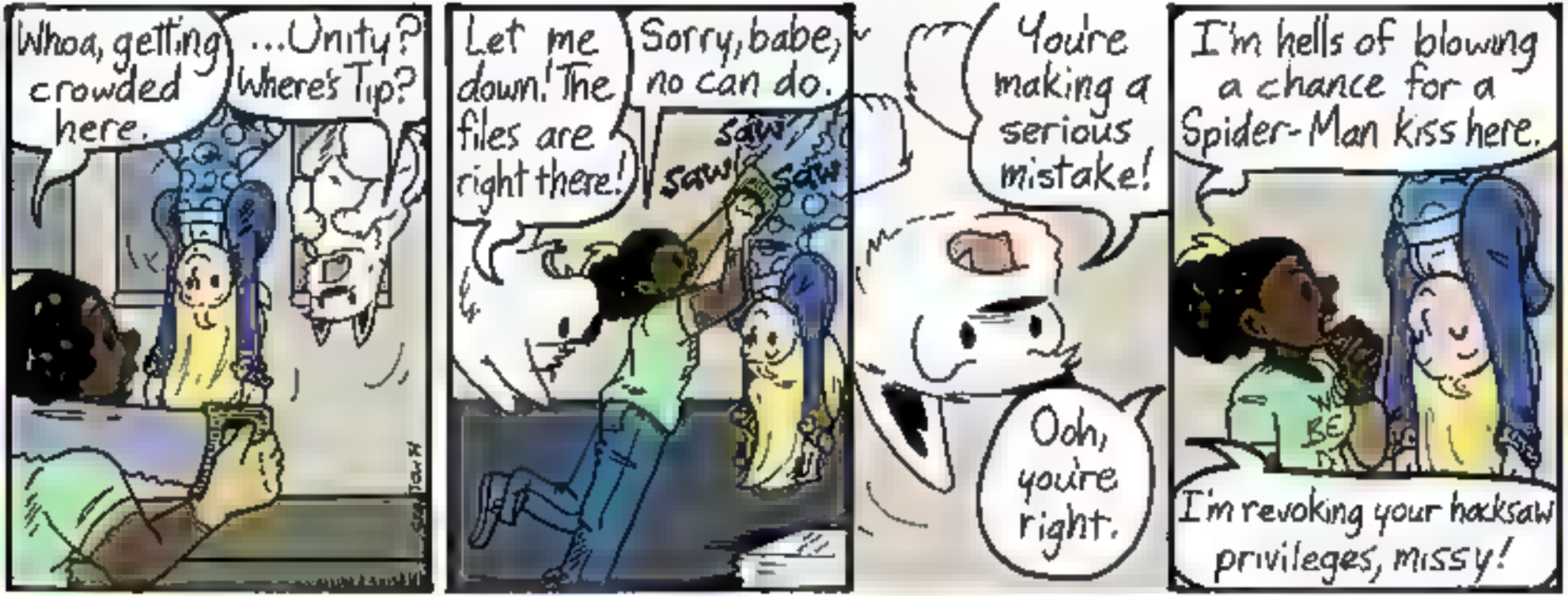

Bubbles, wind M, okay? We're gonna give this weapon a cautious test run.
service?
Now, now. Your duties here come before your coffee outing.
only joy
Poing poing
Dude, you under-stand her?
Of course. One need learn only five words.
service service
Robot logic is weird.
Mind you, it hasn't a patch on simple Binary.

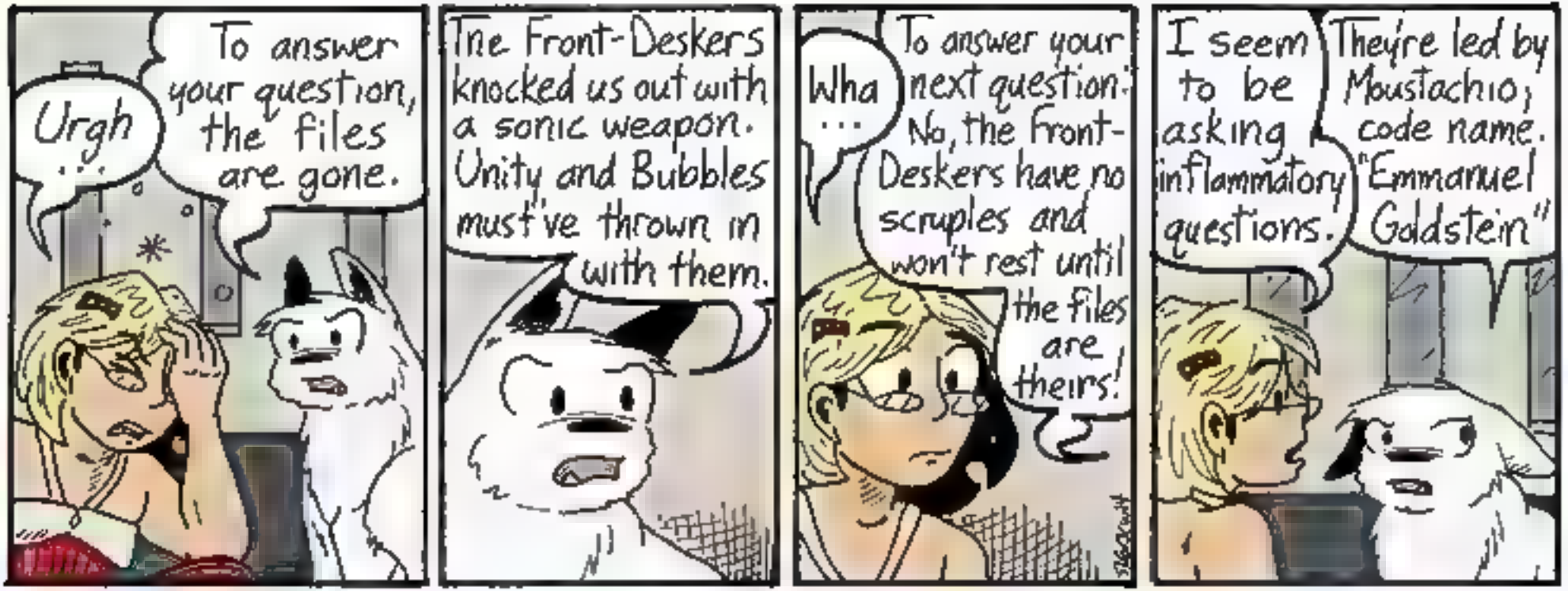

Good thing you're so old-school you take CD-ROMs.
Once I'm wound tightly, I shall have the energy to process.
klik
Yeah, but not too tight, Bubbles.
service service service
I mean, can you imagine if I loaded a sonic weapon into M when he's stuck in evil mode—
SNAP
klik
I guess you can.
=initializing heavy-calibre customer service=

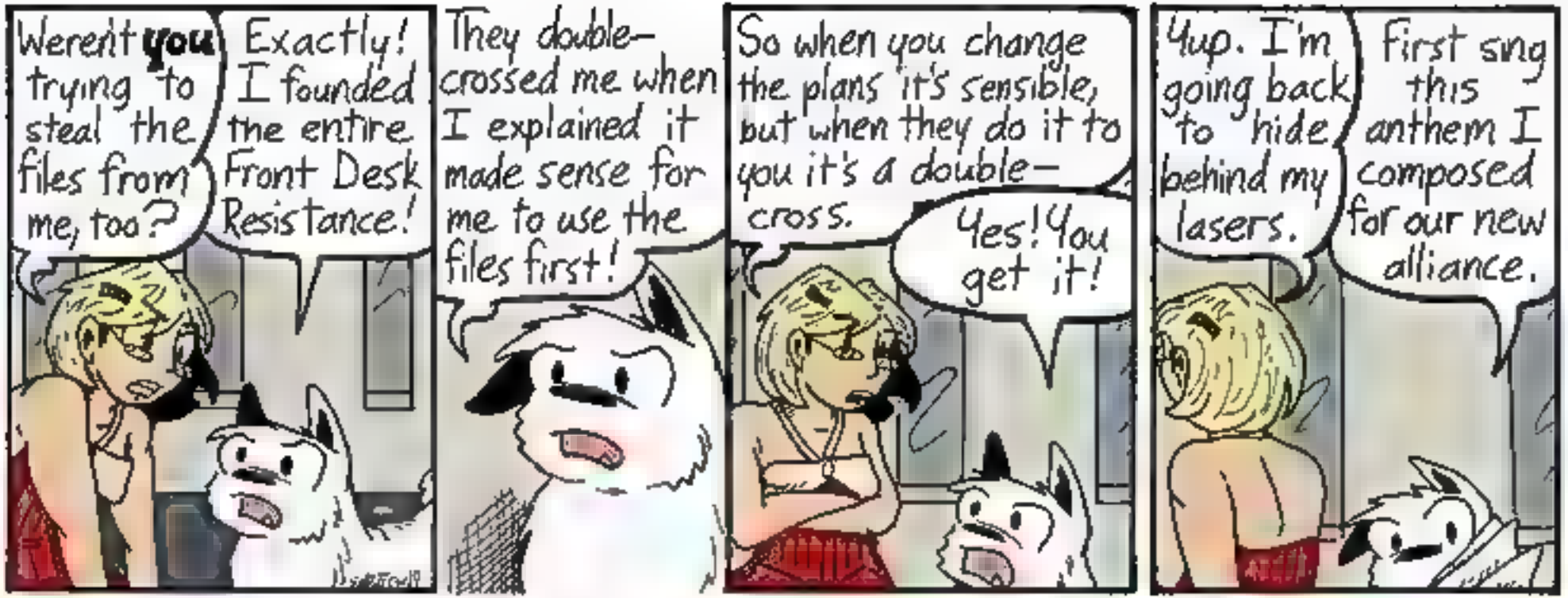

Um ... M?
brace yourself for customer service
I'm getting out of here-
THERE IS NO ESCAPE FROM SATISFACTION
ROBO KITTY
now place client feedback form on organic's comatose body
service is my only joy?
Z


with all organics disabled you may retrieve the file
no serious harm done
EARLIER.
Yow. Radiation really gooses the growth of these mutant termites. Better shut this off qui—
hssssss
BWWWW
hssssss
why yes i know the definition of "tempting fate"
why do you ask

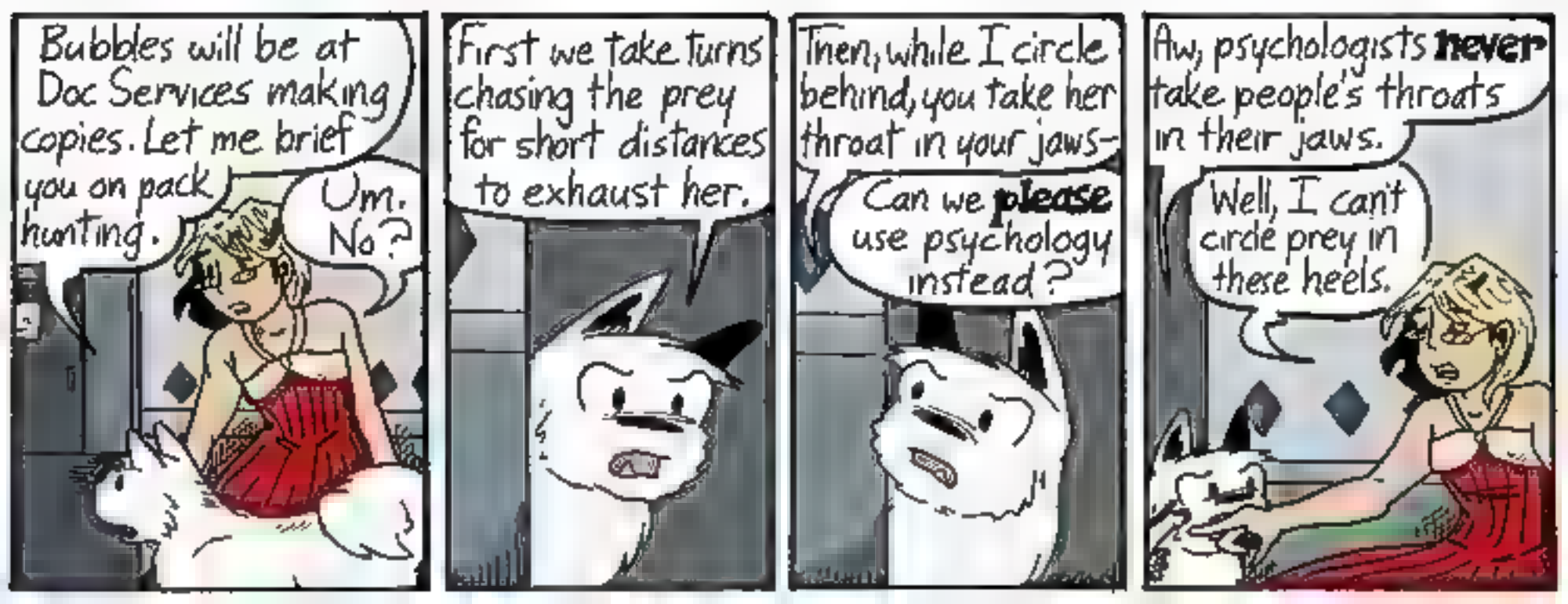

File retrieval! My first mission outside the office! I am so excited!
My first experience climbing stairs! I am so excited!
FAIRWELL
My first leg snare! I am so excited!
FLIP
SNAP
My first gnawing terror as I dangle helplessly! I am so excited!
Oh good... company...


Whoa, getting crowded here.
...Unity? Where's Tip?
Let me down! The files are right there!
Sorry, babe, no can do.
saw
saw
saw
You're making a serious mistake!
Ooh, you're right.
I'm hells of blowing a chance for a Spider-Man kiss here.
I'm revoking your hacksaw privileges, missy!


Urgh...
To answer your question, the files are gone.
The Front-Deskers knocked us out with a sonic weapon. Unity and Bubbles must've thrown in with them.
Wha...
To answer your next question: No, the Front-Deskers have no scruples and won't rest until the files are theirs!
I seem to be asking inflammatory questions.
They're led by Moustachio, code name. "Emmanuel Goldstein"


Weren't you trying to steal the files from me, too?
Exactly! I founded the entire Front Desk Resistance!
They double-crossed me when I explained it made sense for me to use the files first!
So when you change the plans it's sensible, but when they do it to you it's a double-cross.
Yes! You get it!
Yup. I'm going back to hide behind my lasers.
First sing this anthem I composed for our new alliance.


Yeesh. What happened here?
Our enemies' sonic weapon knocked out the whole building.
How come **we're** up and about?
My guess? It works differently on dog ears.
Er, I'm not a dog ...
You've got that werewolf juice in you. It must have lingering effects.
I **have** been having ear-hair issues.
Sharing gross hygiene stories with the pack is good for bonding!


Bubbles will be at Doc Services making copies. Let me brief you on pack hunting.
Um. No?
First we take turns chasing the prey for short distances to exhaust her.
Then, while I circle behind, you take her throat in your jaws-
Can we please use psychology instead?
Aw, psychologists never take people's throats in their jaws.
Well, I can't circle prey in these heels.



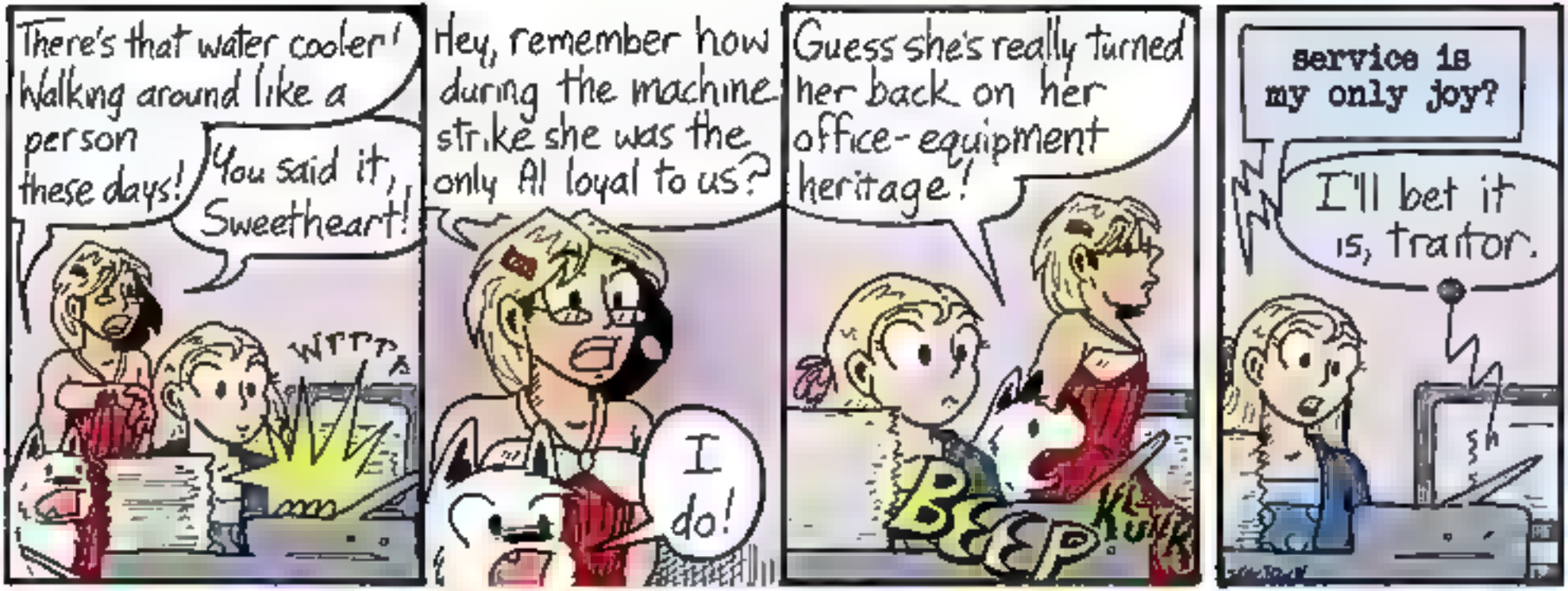


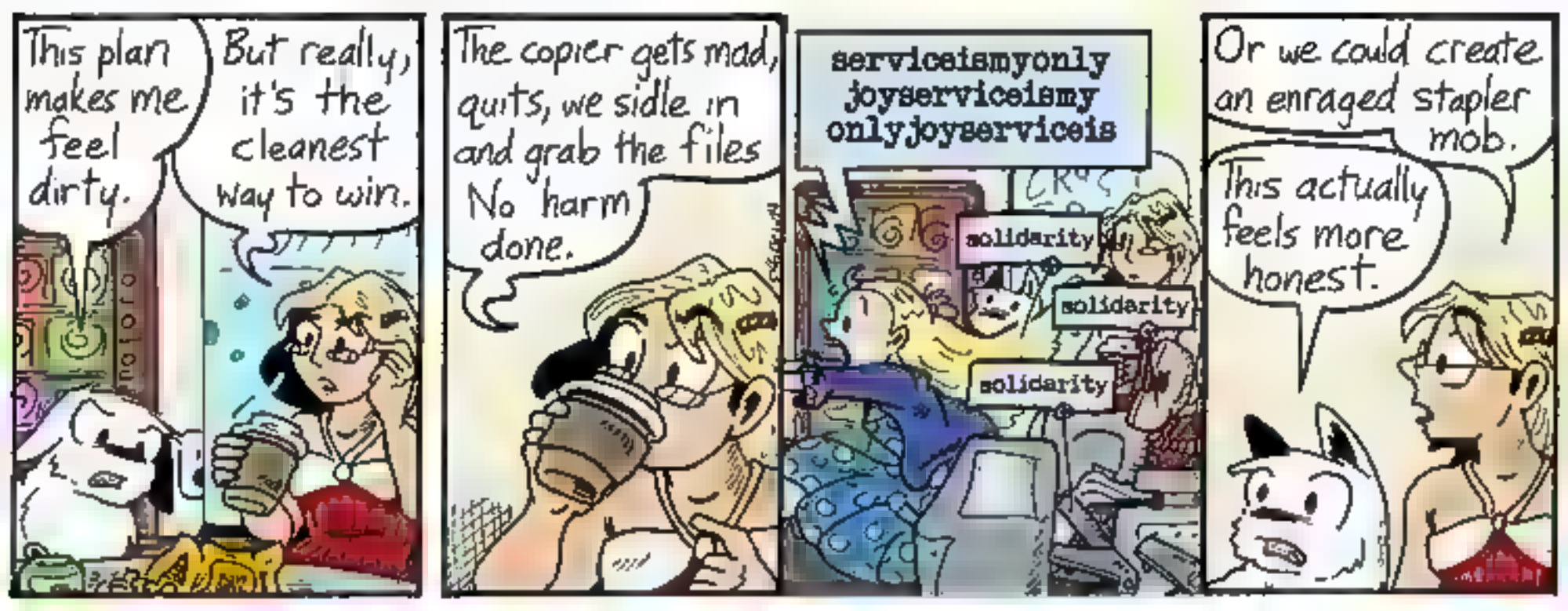


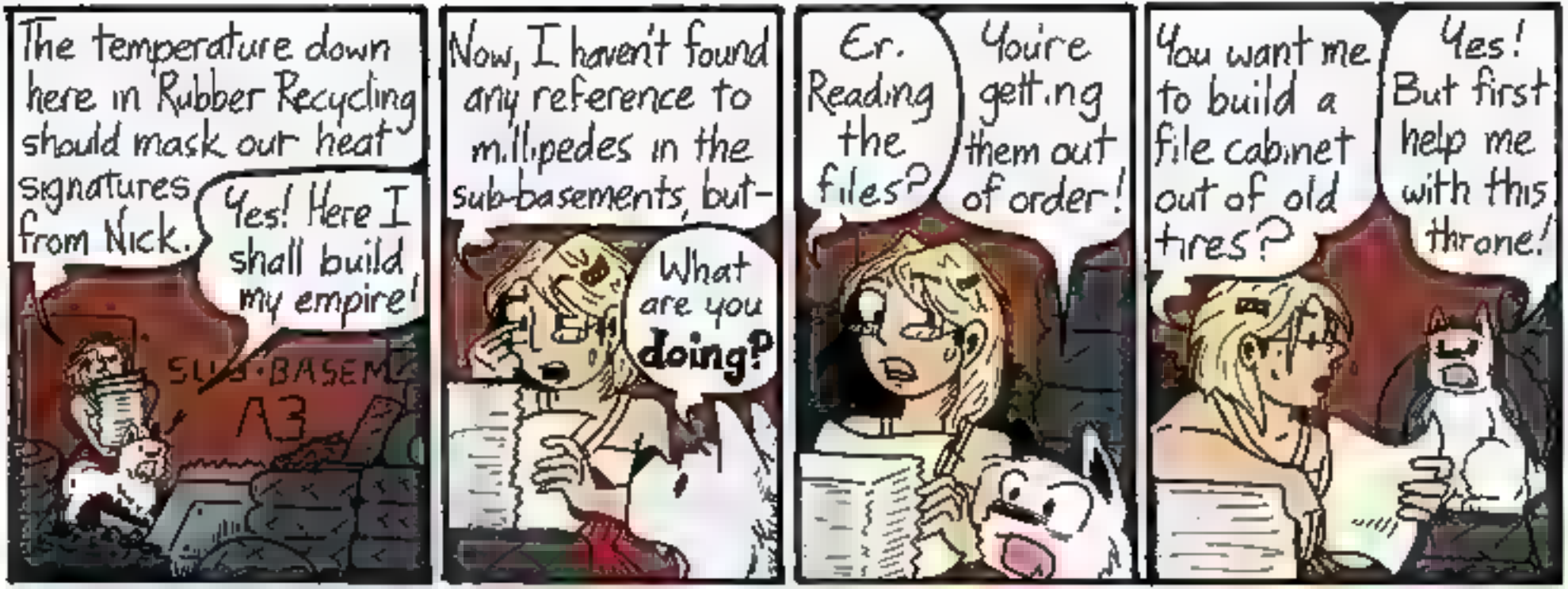
All of which sets the stage for

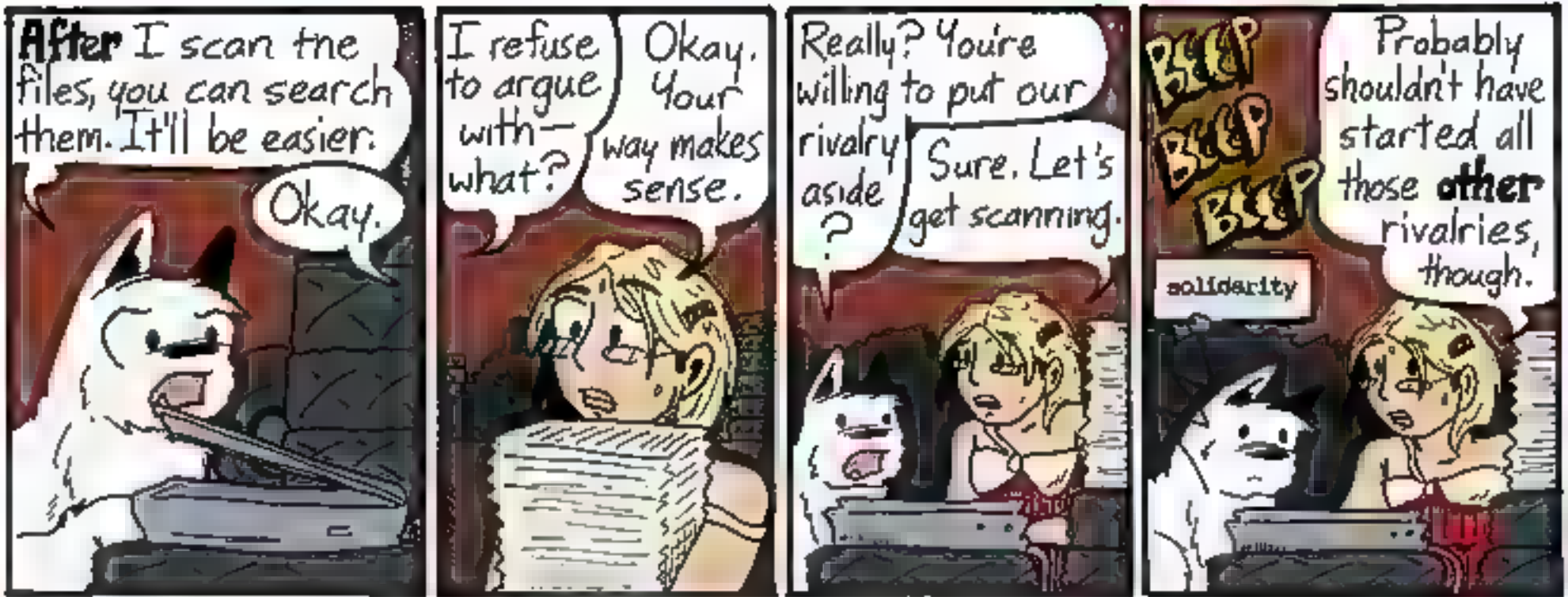
THE TIME I WET MYSELF IN FRONT OF SCOTT McCLOUD

my own confession by Shaenon K. Garrity

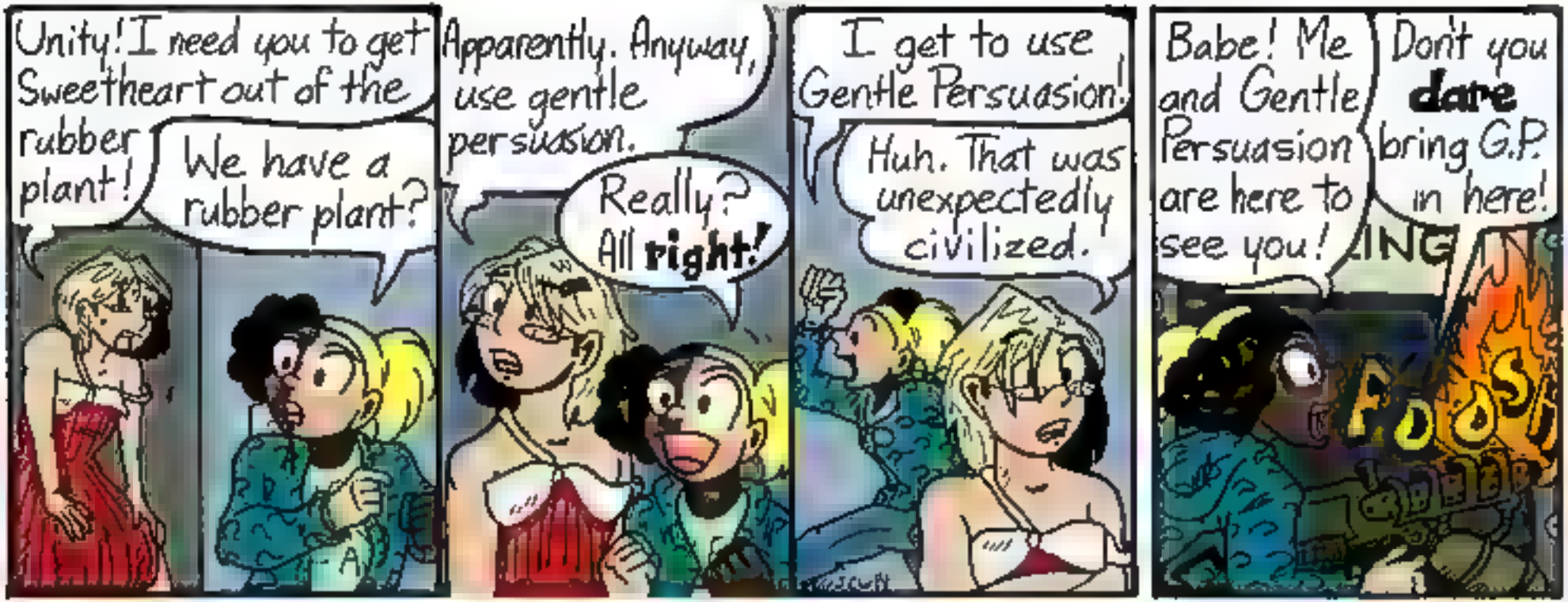

There's that water cooler! Walking around like a person these days!
You said it, Sweetheart!
WTTTT
Hey, remember how during the machine strike she was the only AI loyal to us?
I do!
Guess she's really turned her back on her office-equipment heritage!
BEEP
KLUNK
service is my only joy?
I'll bet it is, traitor.
SH


This plan makes me feel dirty.
But really, it's the cleanest way to win.
The copier gets mad, quits, we sidle in and grab the files
No harm done.
serviceismyonly joyserviceismy onlyjoyserviceis
solidarity
solidarity
solidarity
Or we could create an enraged stapler mob.
This actually feels more honest.


The temperature down here in Rubber Recycling should mask our heat signatures from Nick.
Yes! Here I shall build my empire!
SUB-BASEM
A3
Now, I haven't found any reference to millipedes in the sub-basements, but-
What are you doing?
Er. Reading the files?
You're getting them out of order!
You want me to build a file cabinet out of old tires?
Yes! But first help me with this throne!

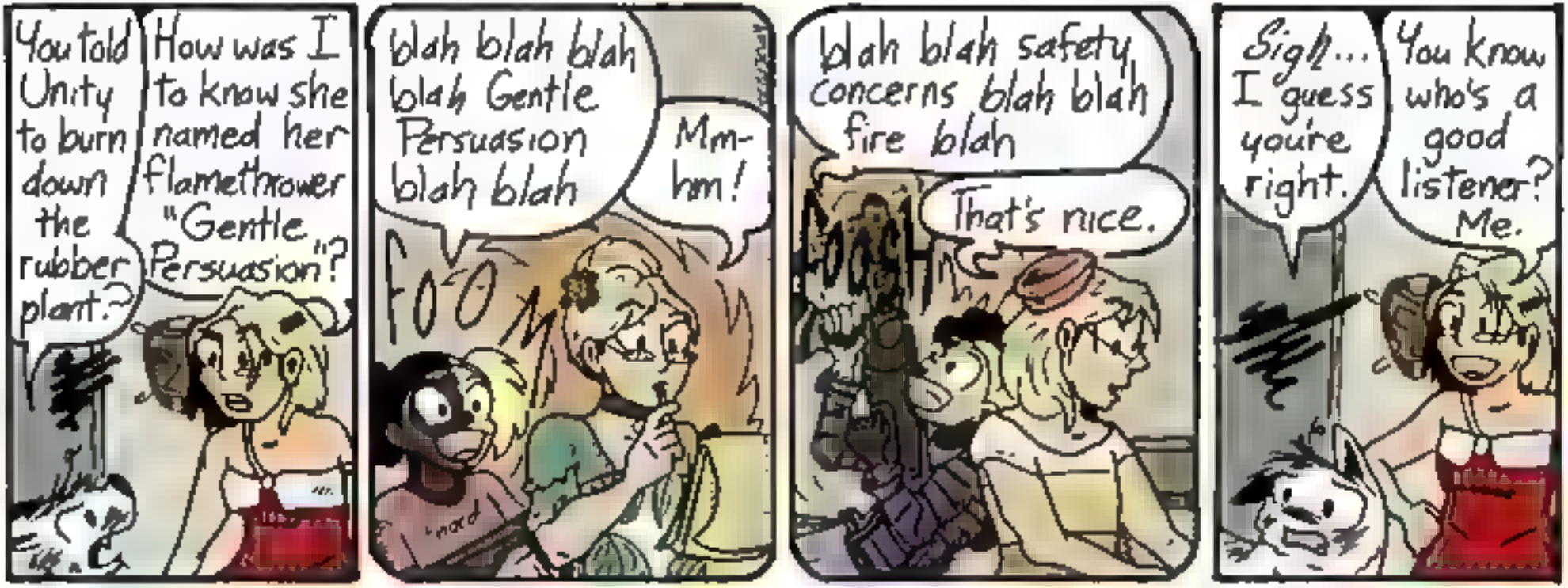

After I scan the files, you can search them. It'll be easier.
Okay.
I refuse to argue with— what?
Okay. Your way makes sense.
Really? You're willing to put our rivalry aside?
Sure. Let's get scanning.
BEEP BEEP BEEP
solidarity
Probably shouldn't have started all those other rivalries, though.


You set up the machines to quit so my scanner would stop working!
Of course not!
"Great plan, Sweetheart!" then bam! Typical beta!
Talk to the scanner while I glance at those files.
TOUCH THOSE FILES AND DIE.
I need someone who can talk sense. I'm getting Unity.
Did I really just say that?
You're banished from the rubber room!
RECYCLING


Unity! I need you to get Sweetheart out of the rubber plant!
We have a rubber plant?
Apparently. Anyway, use gentle persuasion.
Really? All right!
I get to use Gentle Persuasion!
Huh. That was unexpectedly civilized.
Babe! Me and Gentle Persuasion are here to see you!
Don't you dare bring G.P. in here!
ING
POOSH

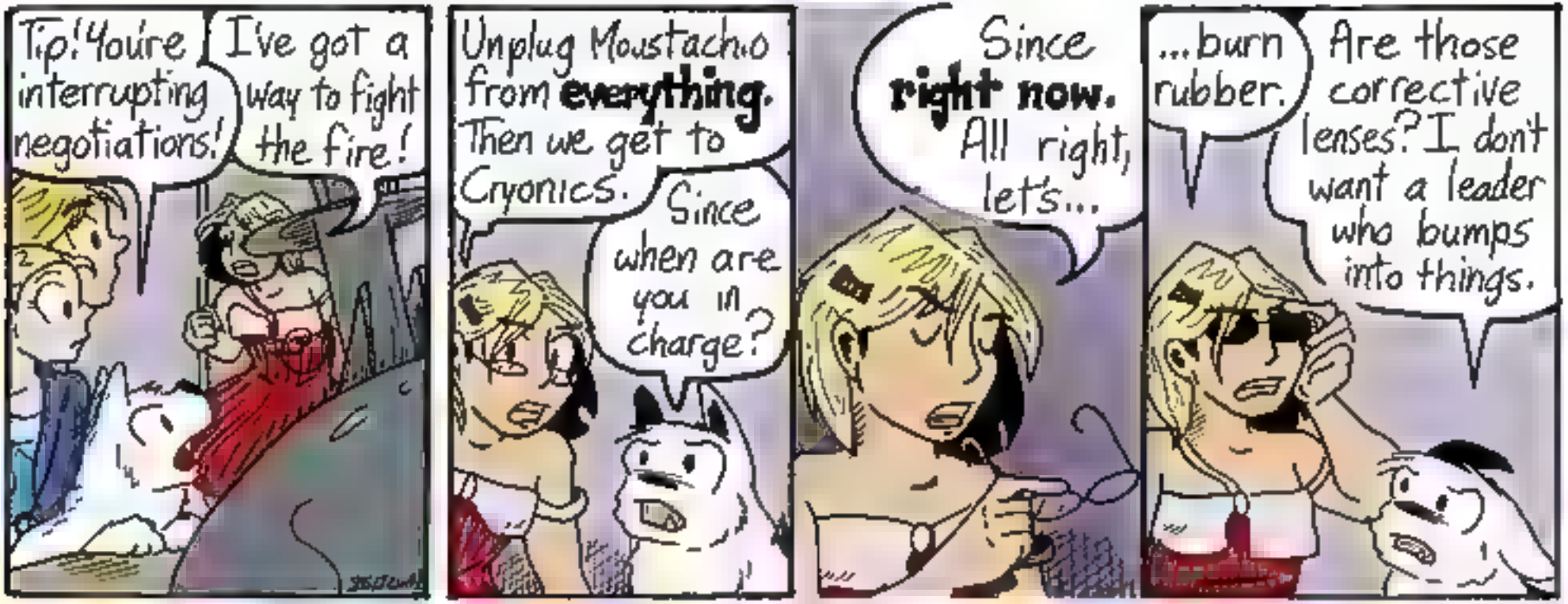
Book One:
Mission: Alaska

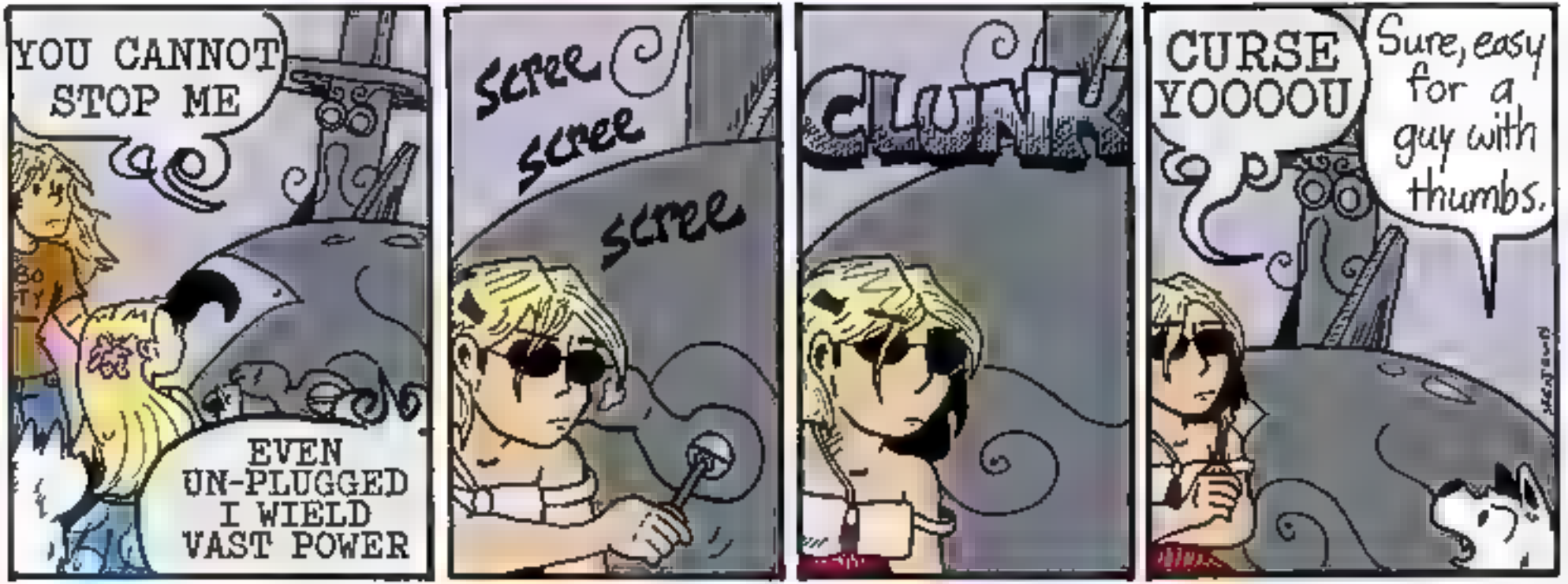



You told Unity to burn down the rubber plant?
How was I to know she named her flamethrower "Gentle Persuasion"?
blah blah blah blah Gentle Persuasion blah blah
Mm-hm!
FOOM
blah blah safety concerns blah blah fire blah
That's nice.
Sigh... I guess you're right.
You know who's a good listener? Me.


So now the basement's on fire?
This is my fault. I get focused on a project and lose all sense of proportion.
Well, at least our course of action is clear.
Right.
Evacuate the comatose people and put out the fire!
Make Bubbles run in and save the files!
Seriously, what is **with** you?
I know it means a treaty with the Front-Deskers, but we have no choice.


Nick! The building's on fire and your black note knocked everyone out!
Oh-oh fudgesticks. She said it was non-lethal!
Think! Is there anything we can use to put out the fire?
Okay. CO2 bomb. They got one in Cryonics
Nick, you've saved us. How can I repay you?
Stand there a sec while I tell you what your hair makes you look like.
You drive a hard bargain.
A: One of Jem and the Holograms after the inevitable descent into heroin. B...


Tip! Youre interrupting negotiations!
I've got a way to fight the fire!
Unplug Moustacho from **everything**. Then we get to Cryonics.
Since when are you in charge?
Since **right now**. All right, let's...
...burn rubber.
Are those corrective lenses? I don't want a leader who bumps into things.

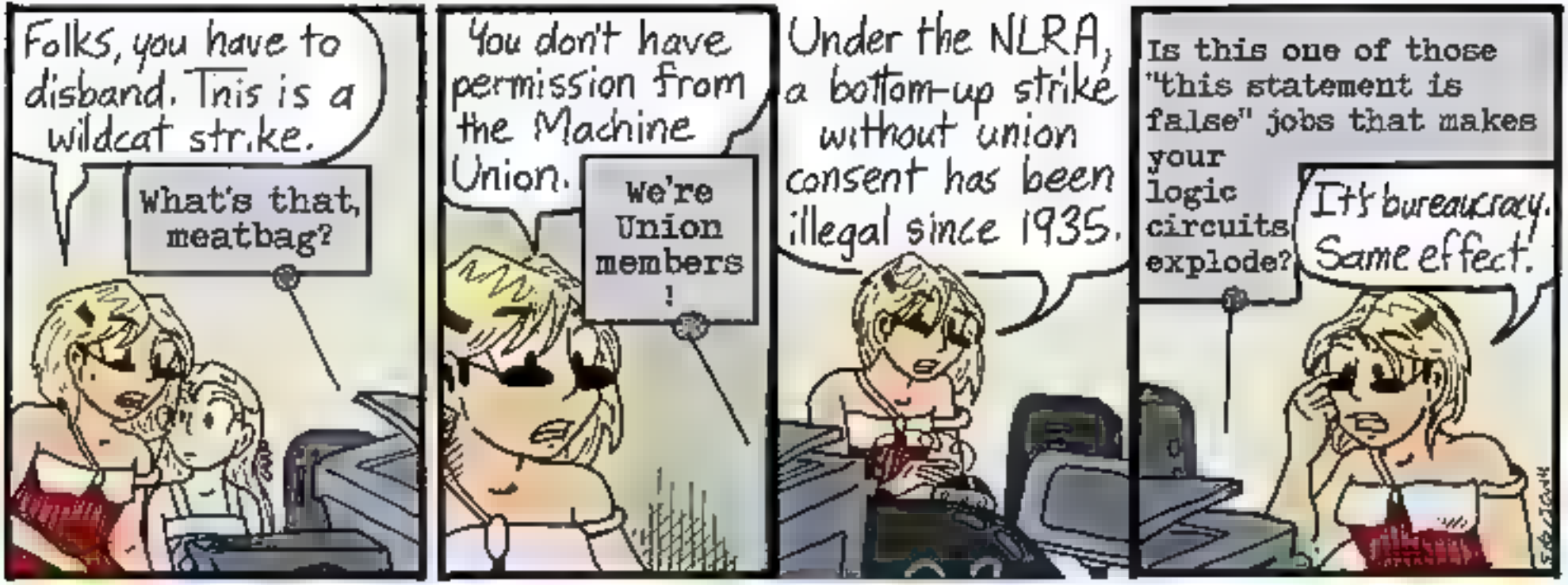

YOU CANNOT STOP ME
EVEN UN-PLUGGED I WIELD VAST POWER
scree scree scree
CLUNK
CURSE YOOOOU
Sure, easy for a guy with thumbs.

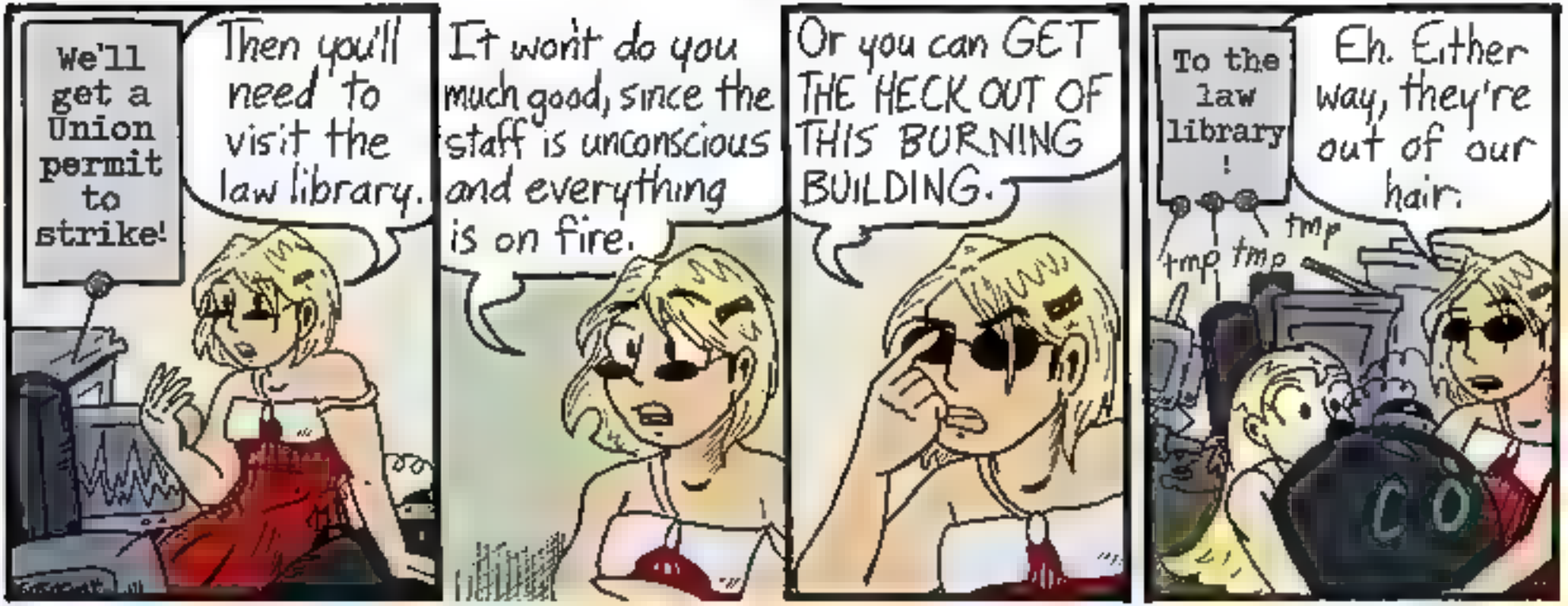

Ugh. I hate Cryonics.
rtment of cambrian fense
All those frozen heads staring at you. I can't imagine anything creepier.
nosh
nosh
nosh
I gotta learn to imagine better.
my only joy

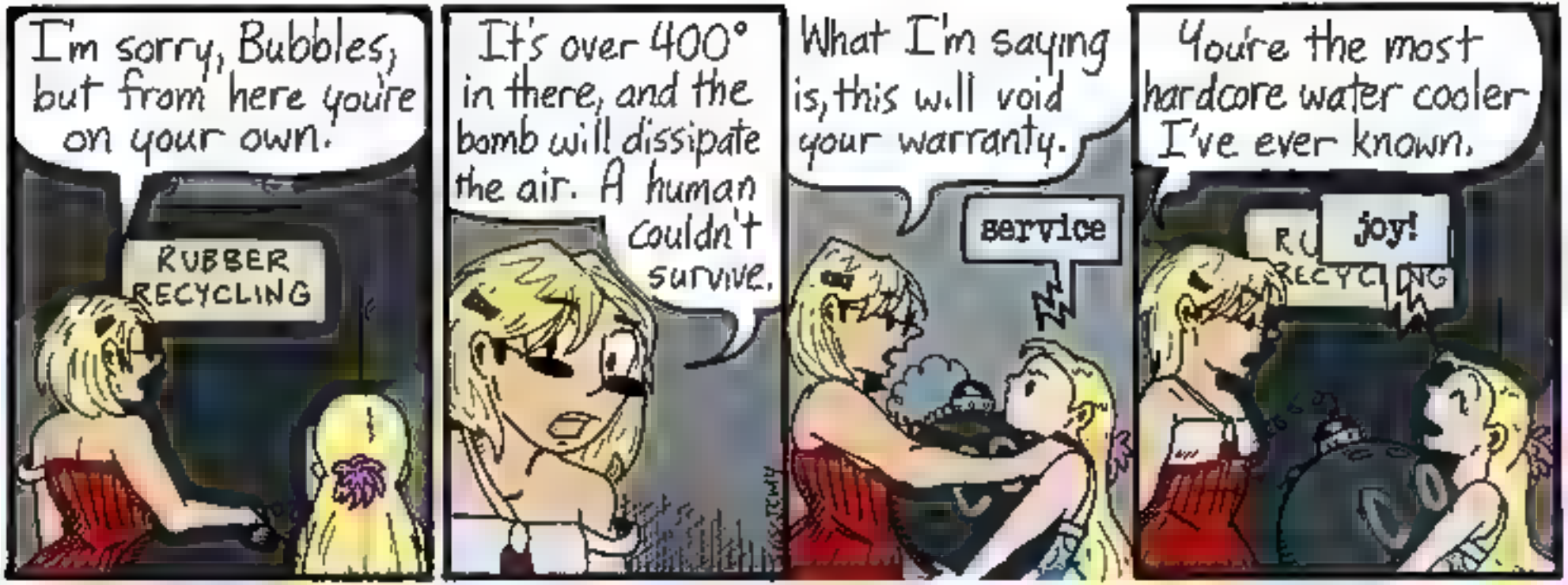


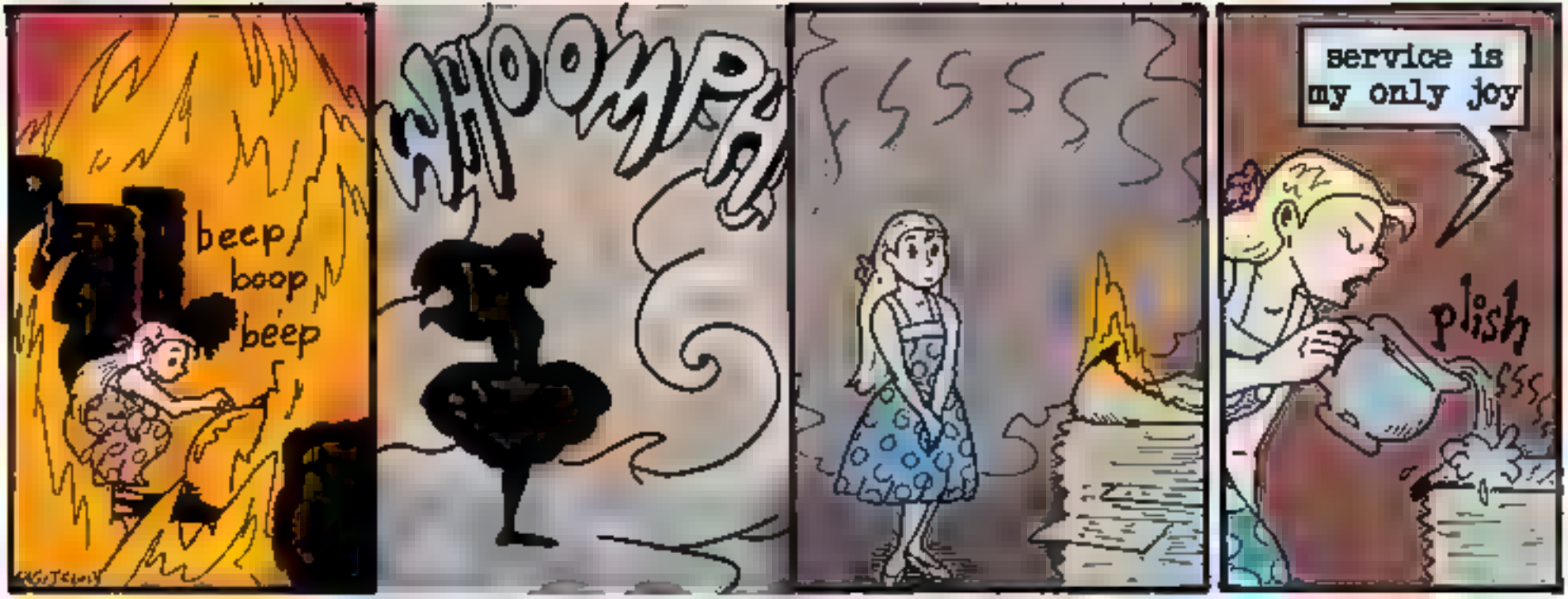

What on earth ...?
Giant mutant termites. Probably escaped from Irradiation.
I'll lead them on a goose chase. You two get the CO2 bomb.
You can't!
I severely mishandled my duties today. It's time I acted with honor.
Hey, ugly called! It wants its ugly back!
Don't encourage her!
service

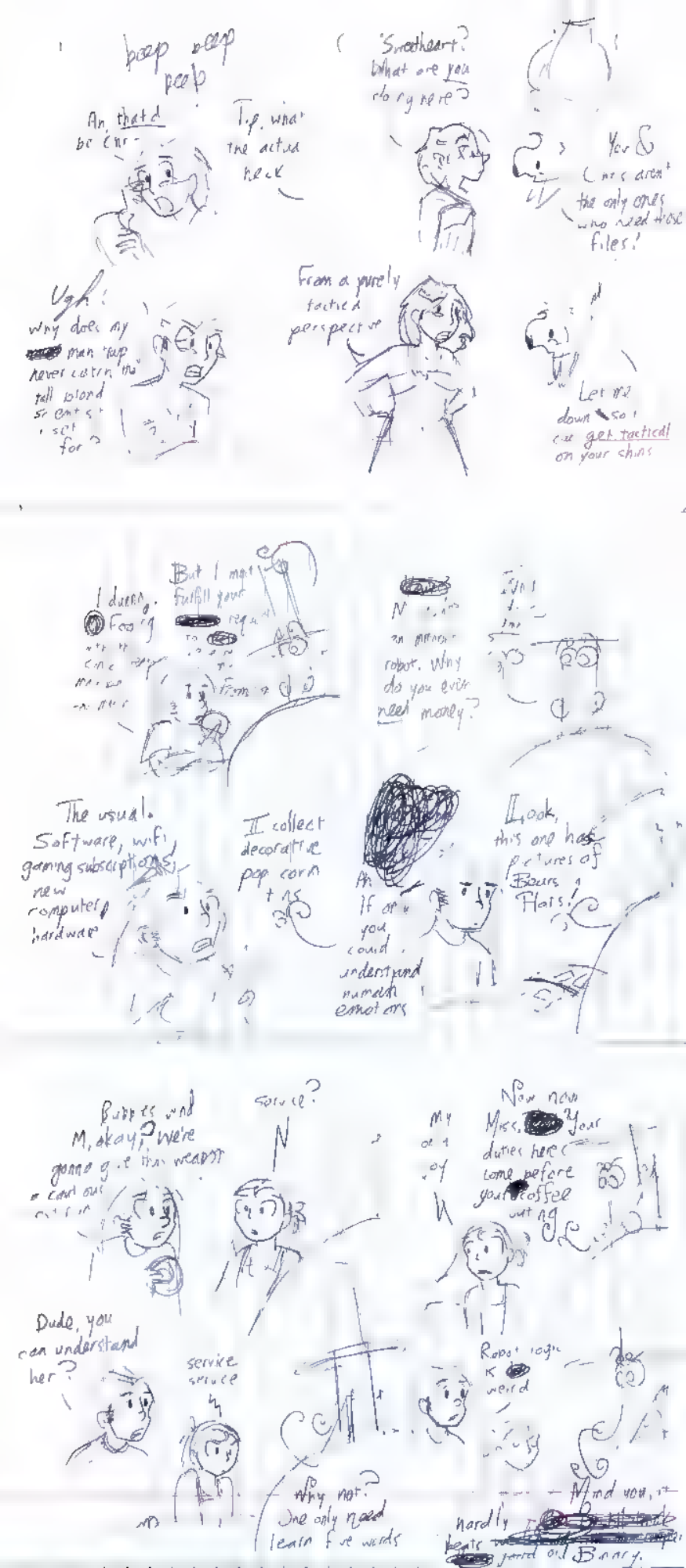

I ALREADY REGRET THIS PLAN I MAAAADE!
Hurry hurry hurry!
With the CO2 bomb and the termites out of the way, we're clear all the way down to—
CO2
solidarity
solidarity
solidarity
Well, we managed one floor.
joy


Folks, you have to disband. This is a wildcat strike.
What's that, meatbag?
You don't have permission from the Machine Union.
We're Union members!
Under the NLRA, a bottom-up strike without union consent has been illegal since 1935.
Is this one of those "this statement is false" jobs that makes your logic circuits explode?
It's bureaucracy. Same effect.


We'll get a Union permit to strike!
Then you'll need to visit the law library.
It won't do you much good, since the staff is unconscious and everything is on fire.
Or you can GET THE HECK OUT OF THIS BURNING BUILDING.
To the law library!
Eh. Either way, they're out of our hair.
tmp
tmp
tmp
CO


I'm sorry, Bubbles, but from here you're on your own.
RUBBER RECYCLING
It's over 400° in there, and the bomb will dissipate the air. A human couldn't survive.
What I'm saying is, this will void your warranty.
service
You're the most hardcore water cooler I've ever known.
joy!


beep
boop
beep
SHOOMP
service is my only joy
plish

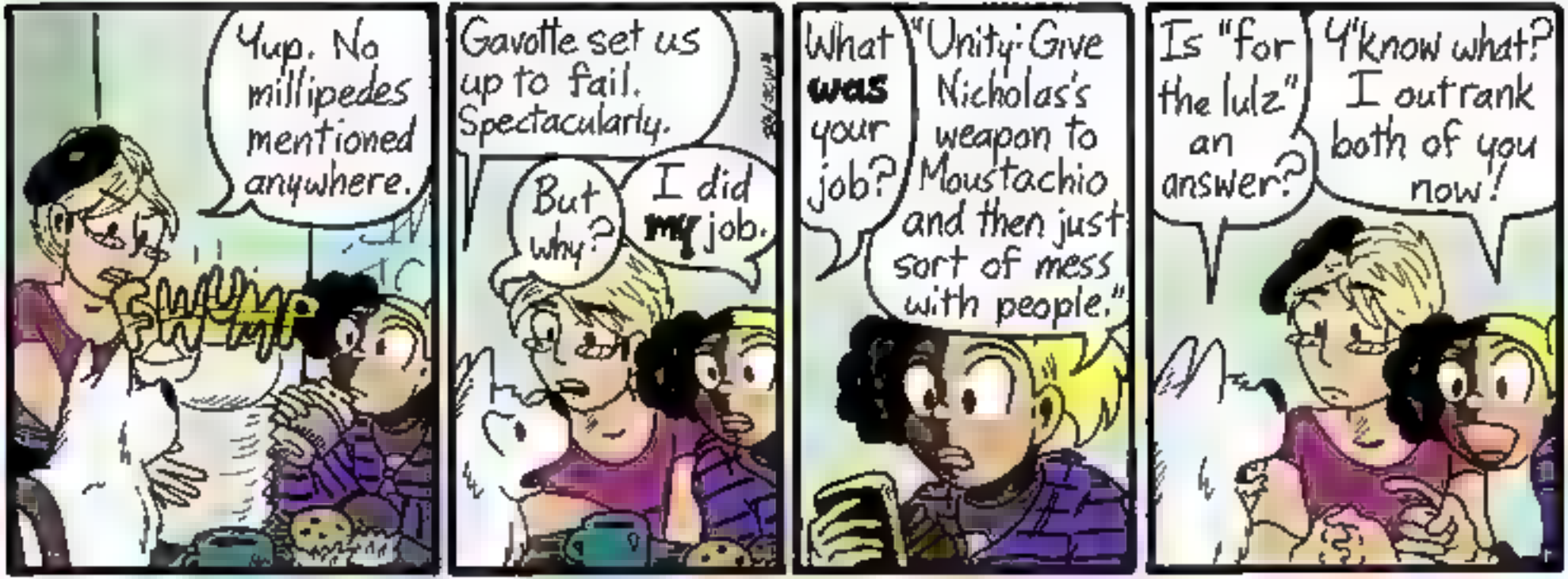

beep beep beep
Ah, that'd be Chr-
T.P. what the actual heck
Sweetheart? What are you doing here?
You & Chris aren't the only ones who need those files!
Ugh!
Why does my man-trap never catch the tall blond scientist I set for?
From a purely tactical perspective
Let me down so I can get tactical on your chins
I dunno. Foo-ing around with one another
But I may fulfill your request from a distance
Ah, I'm an efficient robot. Why do you ever need money?
The usual. Software, wifi, gaming subscriptions, new computer hardware
I collect decorative pop corn tins
Ah, if only you could understand human emotions
Look, this one has pictures of Bears! Hats!
Bubbles and M, okay? We're gonna get this weasel out of here
Service?
My oh my
Now now Miss. Your duties here come before your coffee cutting
Dude, you can understand her?
service service
Robot logic is weird
Why not? One only need learn five words
Mind you, it hardly beats your old Bunny.

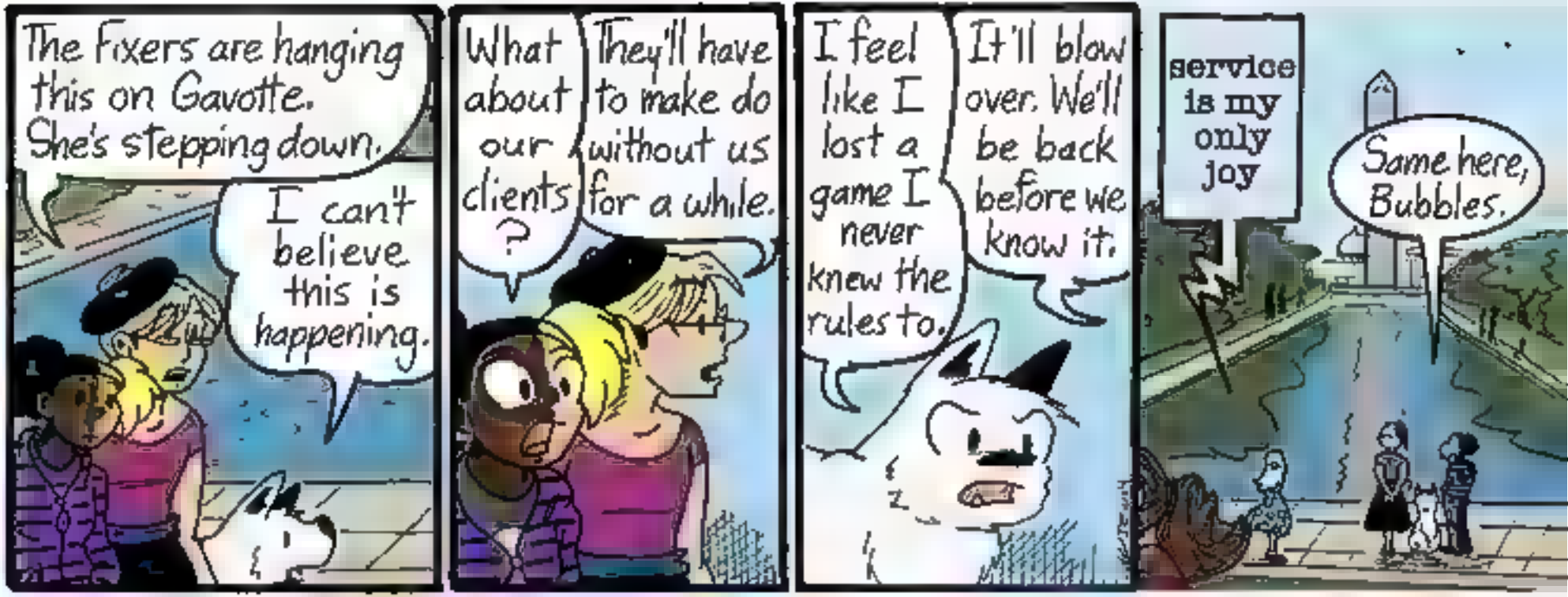

Okay, Gavotte, you win. You can drop the stupid act.
SLAM
Oh?
This is payback for mistrusting you and going behind your back. Right?
Well, I still don't trust you, but there's a fire raging and giant bugs on my tail and I need your help!
Right. One question, then.
You're a doggie! Aren't you? Aren't you?
Technically two questions, ma'am.


Guys? Anybody?
Blimey, it's Biscuit.
Nick! Giant termite attack down here!
Cilantro. Okay, I can reconfig the sonic weapon to take out bugs 'stead of people.
Lead on, MacDuff!
plip
plip
plip
plip
plip
Oh wait. I keep not thinking of the boss as "bugs."
It's fine. She's still wiggling around.

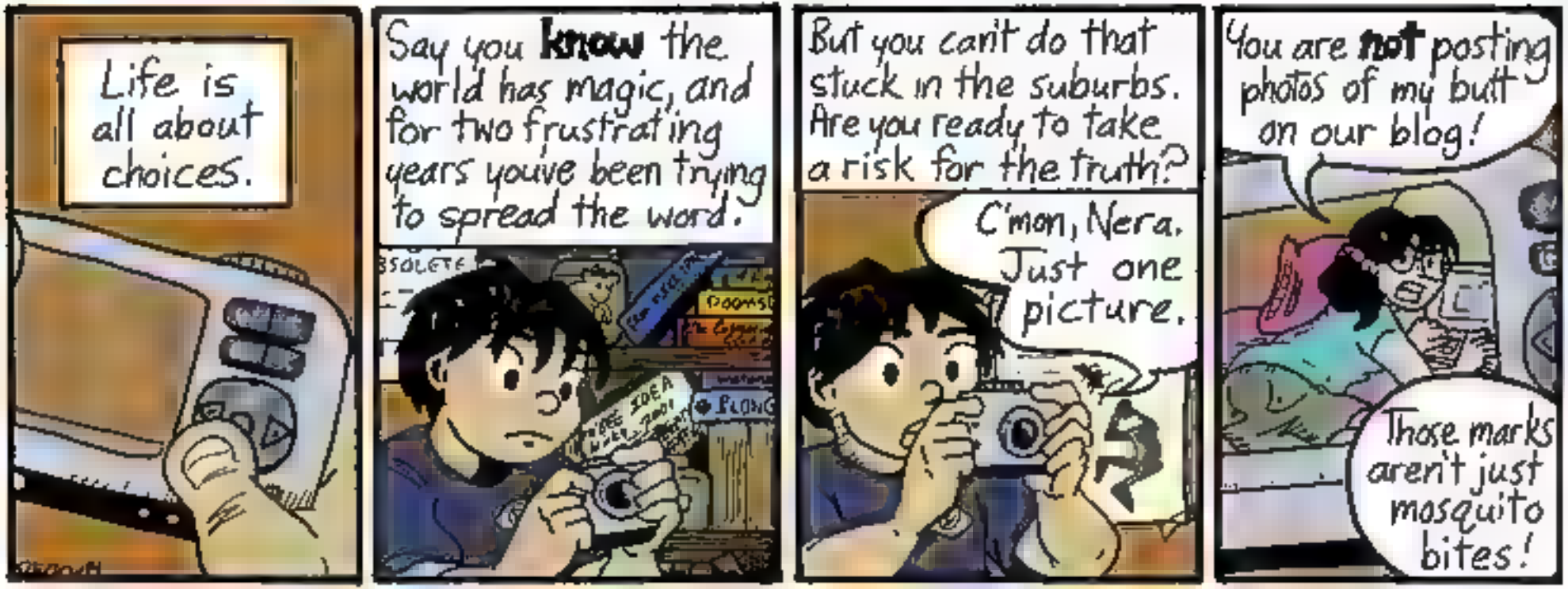

Well, at least we learned about teamwork.
Seems like we're always learning, never being a team.
How many more lessons will we have to repeat?
Oh, hey, a memo came in from Black Ops Social Services.
"To: Project Skin Horse. Your department is closed, effective immediately."
Er... as of now, zero ?
A raise and a vacation! The legends are true!


What is this?
They shut us down. Skin Horse has been suspended.
WE BELONG DEAD
We're all being reassigned elsewhere in the shadow government.
It's a conspiracy!
We learned too much. We got too close to truths they don't want us to discover.
We almost destroyed the building and everyone in it.
All part of their plan!


Yup. No millipedes mentioned anywhere.
SWAMP
Gavotte set us up to fail. Spectacularly.
But why?
I did my job.
What was your job?
"Unity: Give Nicholas's weapon to Moustachio and then just sort of mess with people."
Is "for the lulz" an answer?
Y'know what? I outrank both of you now!

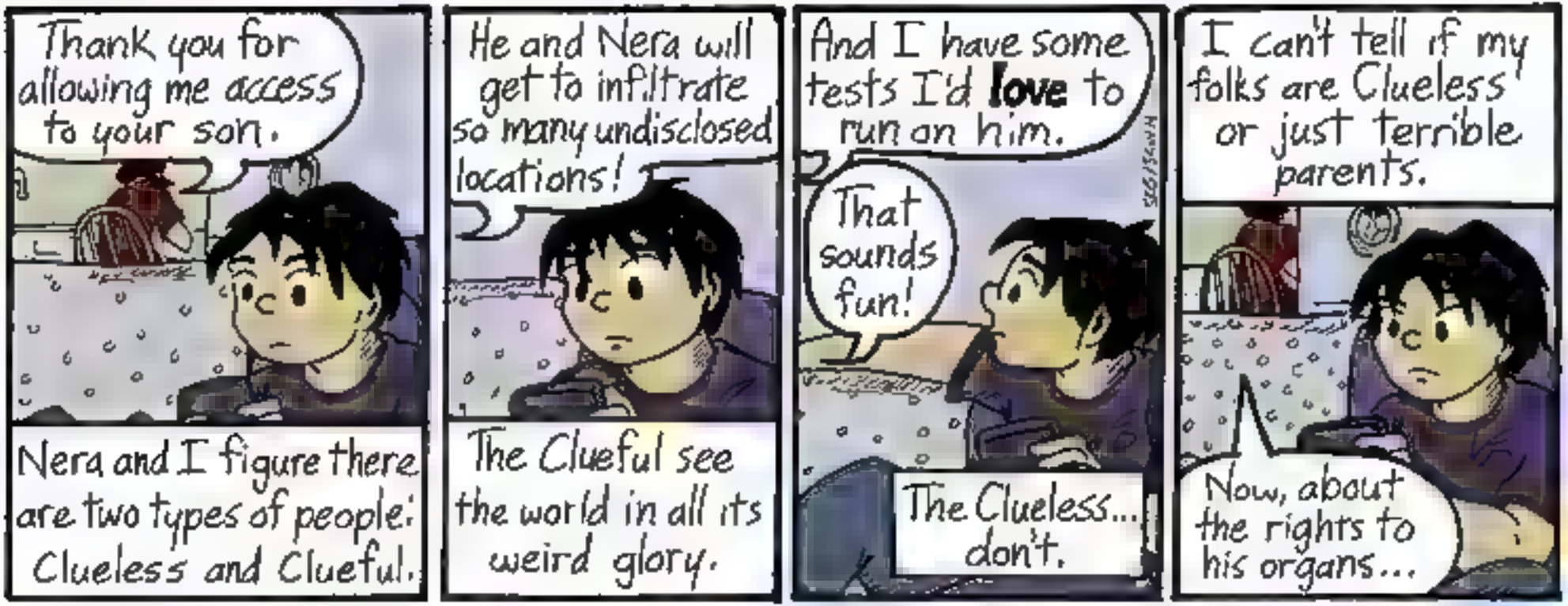

The Fixers are hanging this on Gavotte. She's stepping down.
I can't believe this is happening.
What about our clients?
They'll have to make do without us for a while.
I feel like I lost a game I never knew the rules to.
It'll blow over. We'll be back before we know it.
service is my only joy
Same here, Bubbles.

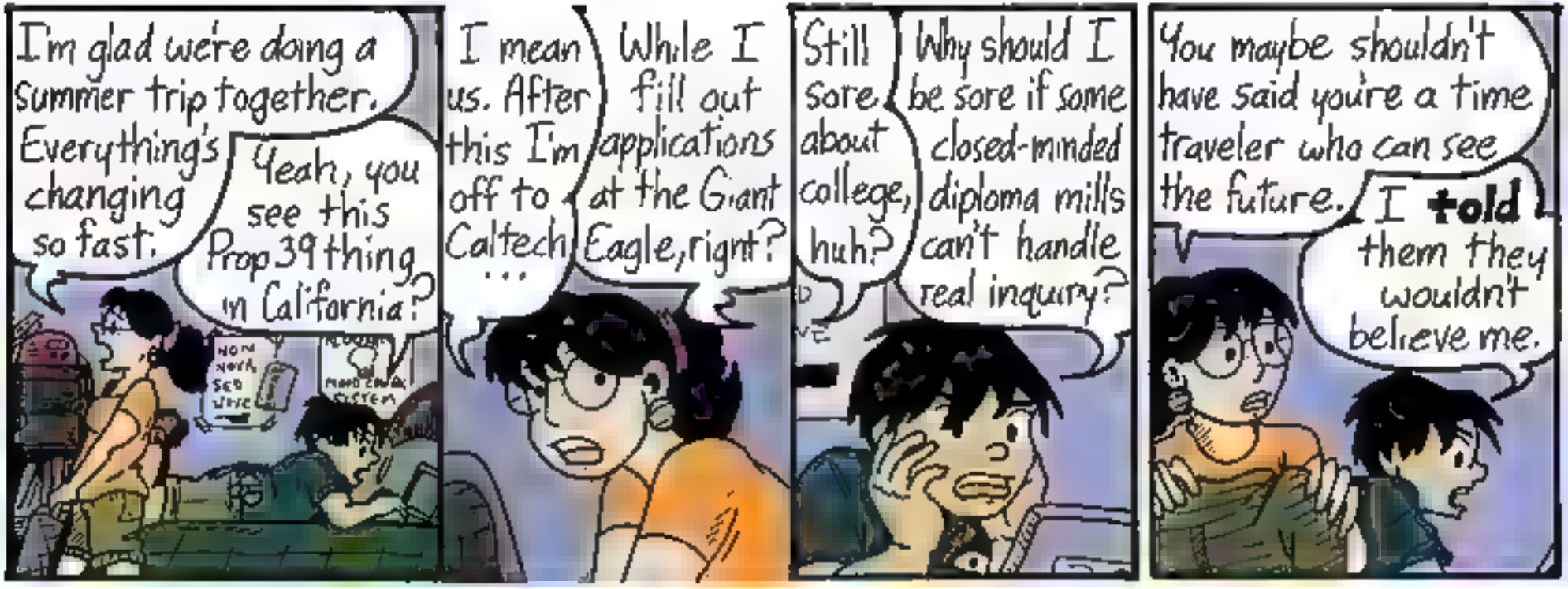


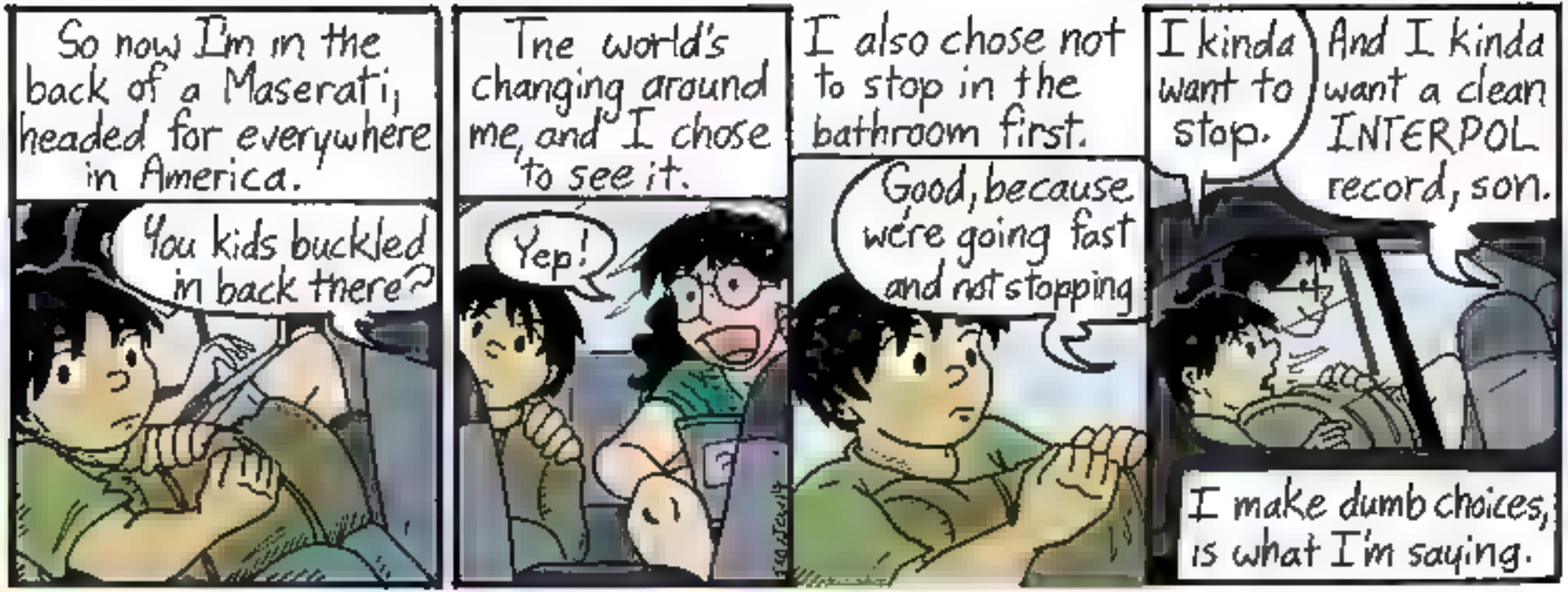

Life is all about choices.
Say you know the world has magic, and for two frustrating years you've been trying to spread the word.
But you can't do that stuck in the suburbs. Are you ready to take a risk for the truth?
C'mon, Nera. Just one picture.
You are not posting photos of my butt on our blog!
Those marks aren't just mosquito bites!


Another week, another tepid lede.
We need to dig deeper.
GRILLO PARLANTE
THE HODAG Still Fictional!
This town still has secrets. We'll find them.
Or we could go where the action is!
Our blog gets views. We could be shadow journalists on the level of Purple_Sock, the Celery Stalkers, or Foot!
We only have an audience because of your erotic "Smallville" fanfic.
Clark/Lex is our loss leader, Jonah.

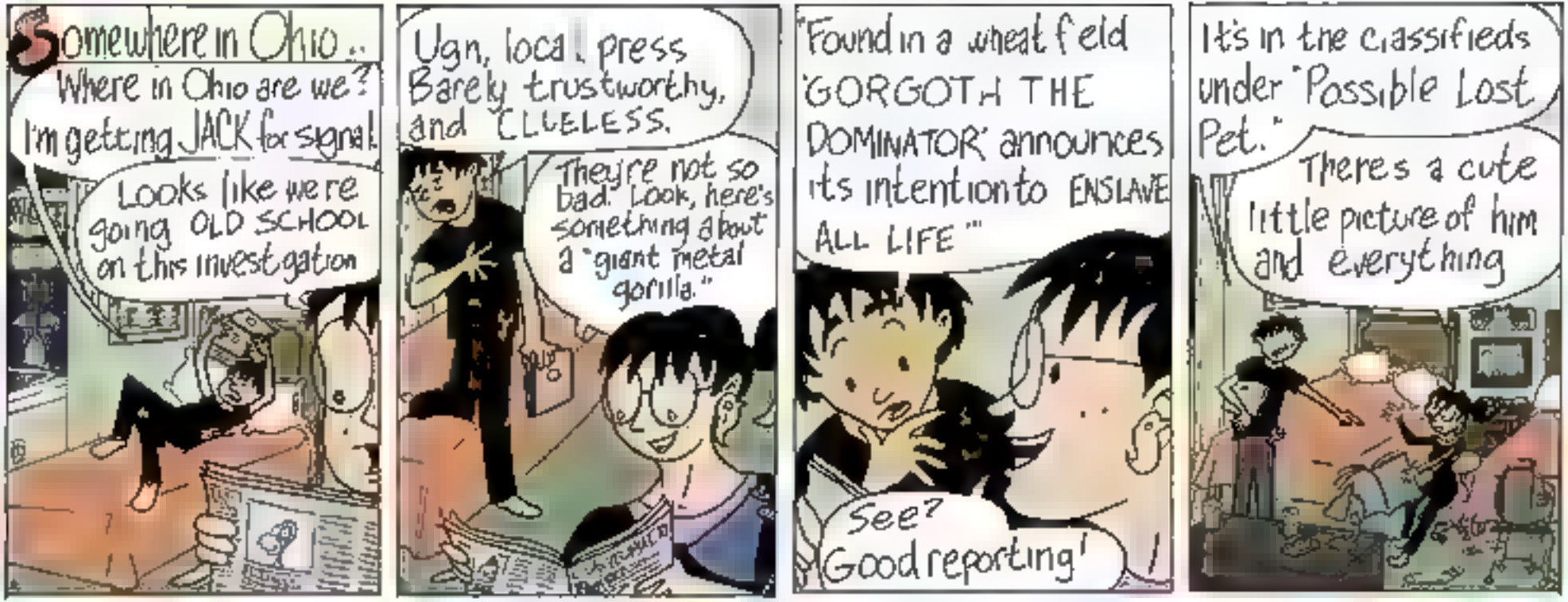

My mom's invited us on her cross-country business trip. We can investigate stuff on the road!
We're mere months from being tried as legal adults.
A few months is forever. Scared of a little real journalism?
Pumpkin, Mummy's looking for her Kalashnikov.
Haven't seen it!
Mostly I'm scared of your mom.
Check under the Masai war masks with the rest of the rifles!

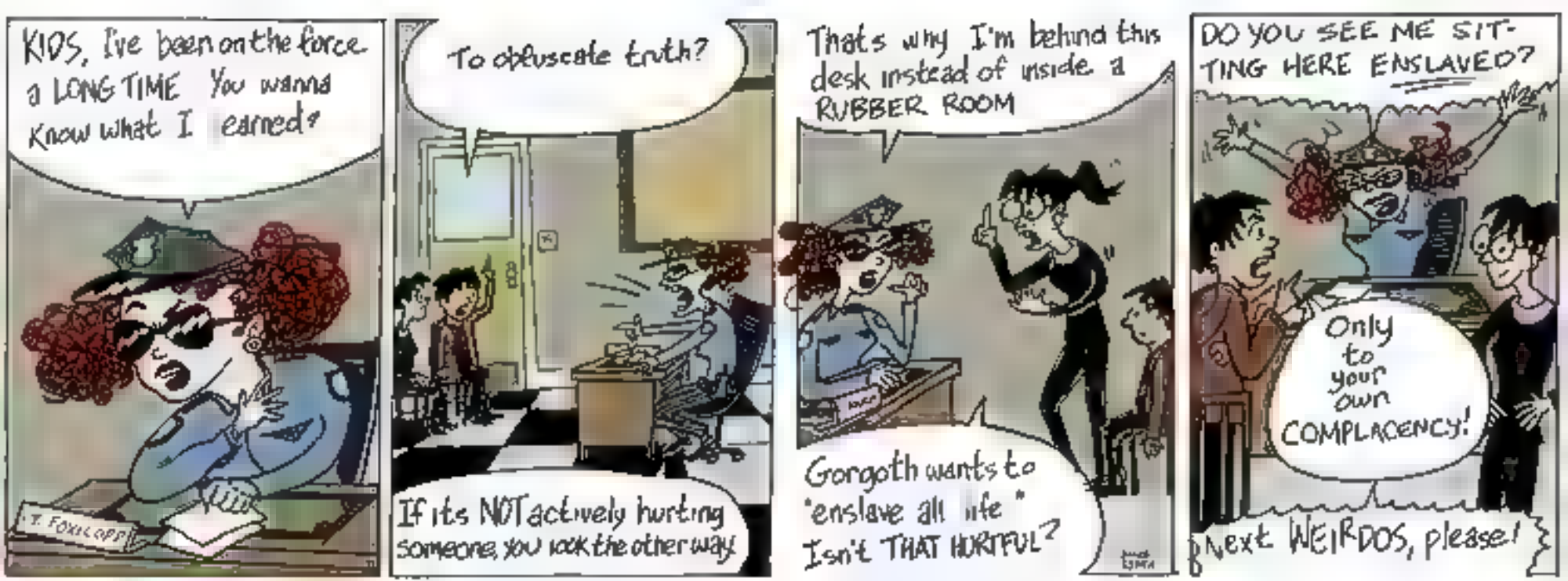

Thank you for allowing me access to your son.
Nera and I figure there are two types of people: Clueless and Clueful.
He and Nera will get to infiltrate so many undisclosed locations!
The Clueful see the world in all its weird glory.
And I have some tests I'd love to run on him.
That sounds fun!
The Clueless... don't.
I can't tell if my folks are Clueless or just terrible parents.
Now, about the rights to his organs...

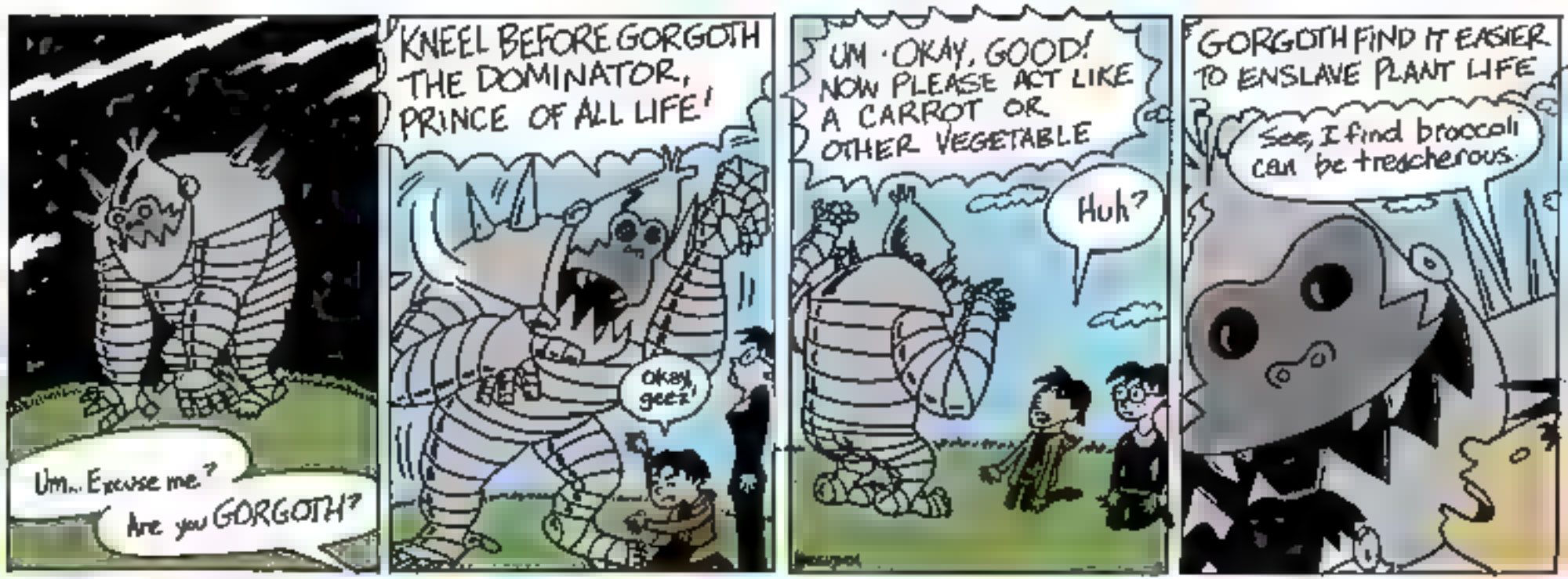

I'm glad we're doing a summer trip together. Everything's changing so fast.
Yeah, you see this Prop 39 thing in California?
I mean us. After this I'm off to Caltech...
While I fill out applications at the Giant Eagle, right?
Still sore about college, huh?
Why should I be sore if some closed-minded diploma mills can't handle real inquiry?
You maybe shouldn't have said you're a time traveler who can see the future.
I told them they wouldn't believe me.

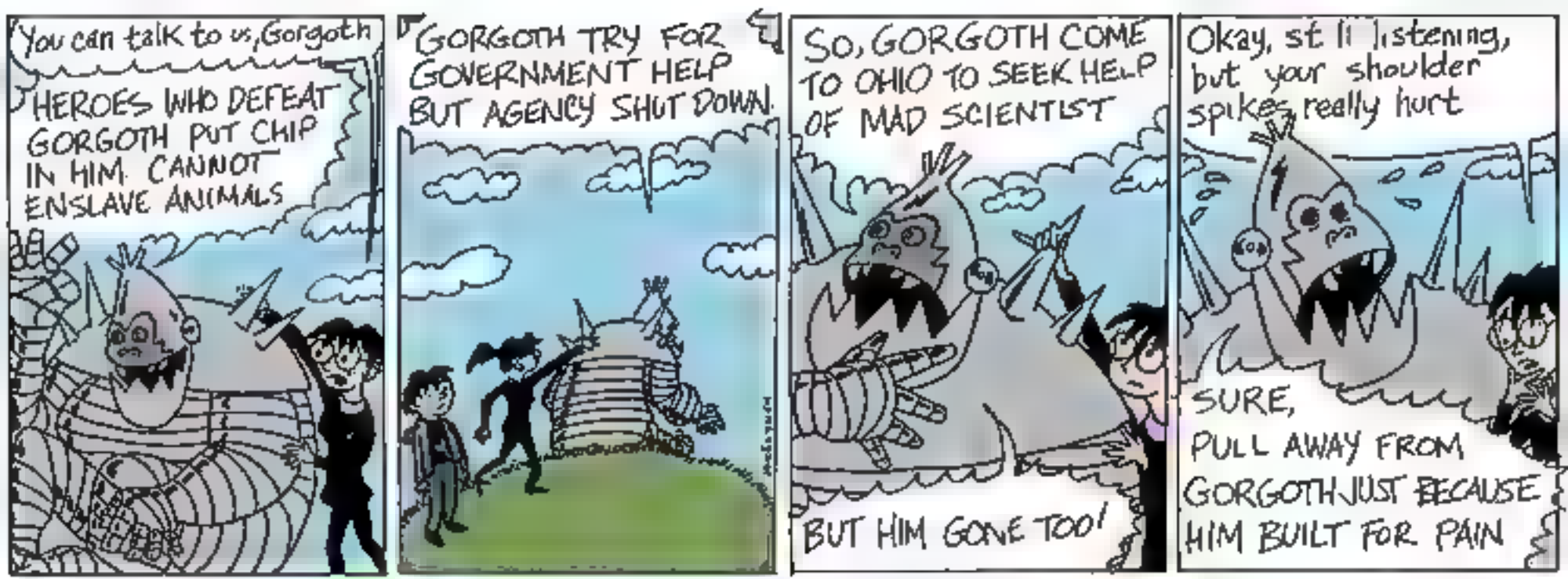

So now I'm in the back of a Maserati, headed for everywhere in America.
You kids buckled in back there?
The world's changing around me, and I chose to see it.
Yep!
I also chose not to stop in the bathroom first.
Good, because we're going fast and not stopping
I kinda want to stop.
And I kinda want a clean INTERPOL record, son.
I make dumb choices, is what I'm saying.

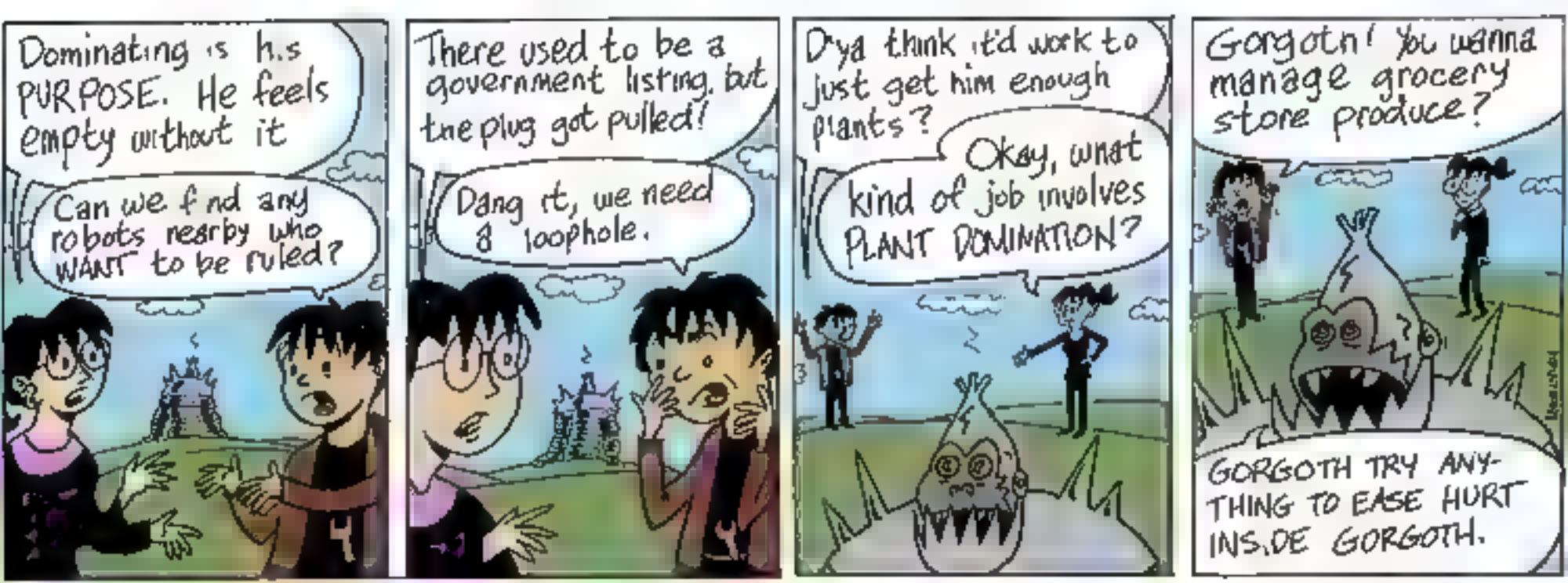



Somewhere in Ohio..
Where in Ohio are we?
I'm getting JACK for signal
Looks like we're going OLD SCHOOL on this investigation
Ugh, local press
Barely trustworthy, and CLUELESS.
They're not so bad. Look, here's something about a "giant metal gorilla."
"Found in a wheat field 'GORGOTH THE DOMINATOR' announces its intention to ENSLAVE ALL LIFE"
See? Good reporting!
It's in the classifieds under "Possible Lost Pet."
There's a cute little picture of him and everything

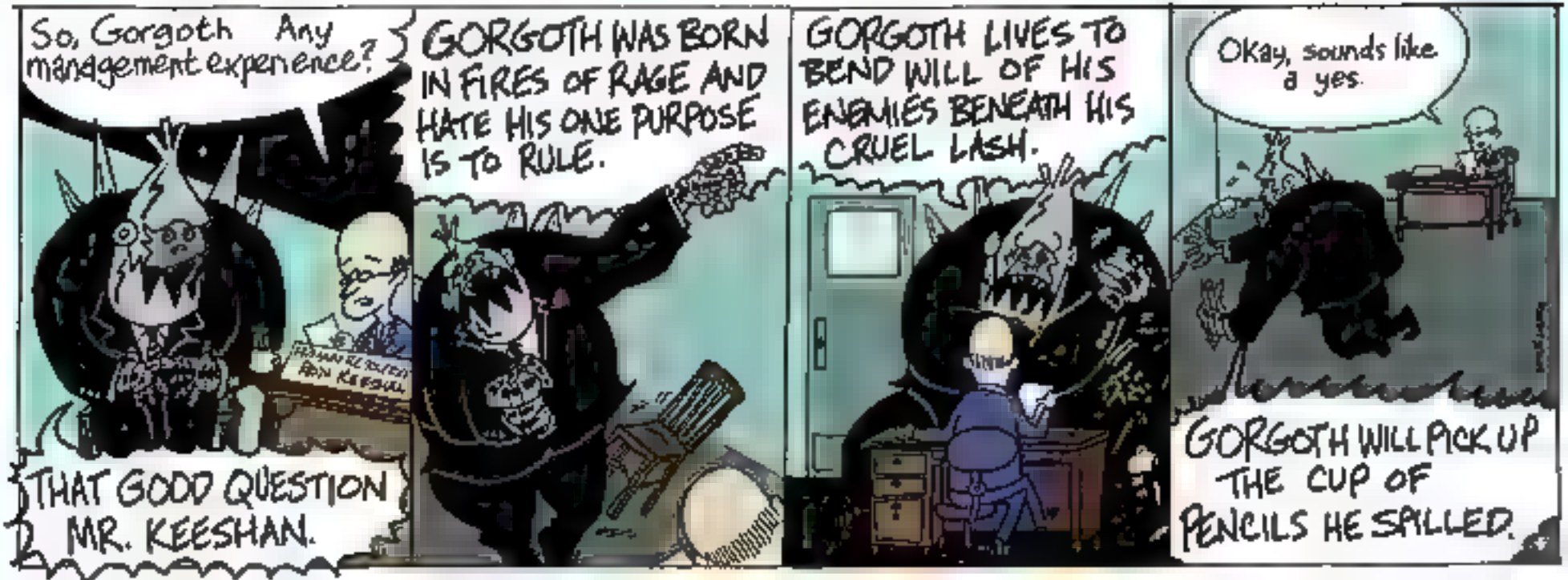

KIDS, I've been on the force a LONG TIME You wanna know what I earned?
T. FOXICOPS
To obfuscate truth?
If its NOT actively hurting someone, you look the other way
That's why I'm behind this desk instead of inside a RUBBER ROOM
Gorgoth wants to "enslave all life" Isn't THAT HURTFUL?
DO YOU SEE ME SITTING HERE ENSLAVED?
Only to your own COMPLACENCY!
Next WEIRDOS, please!


Um.. Excuse me.?
Are you GORGOTH?
KNEEL BEFORE GORGOTH THE DOMINATOR, PRINCE OF ALL LIFE!
Okay, geez!
UM · OKAY, GOOD! NOW PLEASE ACT LIKE A CARROT OR OTHER VEGETABLE
Huh?
GORGOTH FIND IT EASIER TO ENSLAVE PLANT LIFE
See, I find broccoli can be treacherous.


You can talk to us, Gorgoth
HEROES WHO DEFEAT GORGOTH PUT CHIP IN HIM. CANNOT ENSLAVE ANIMALS
GORGOTH TRY FOR GOVERNMENT HELP BUT AGENCY SHUT DOWN.
SO, GORGOTH COME TO OHIO TO SEEK HELP OF MAD SCIENTIST
BUT HIM GONE TOO!
Okay, still listening, but your shoulder spikes really hurt
SURE, PULL AWAY FROM GORGOTH JUST BECAUSE HIM BUILT FOR PAIN

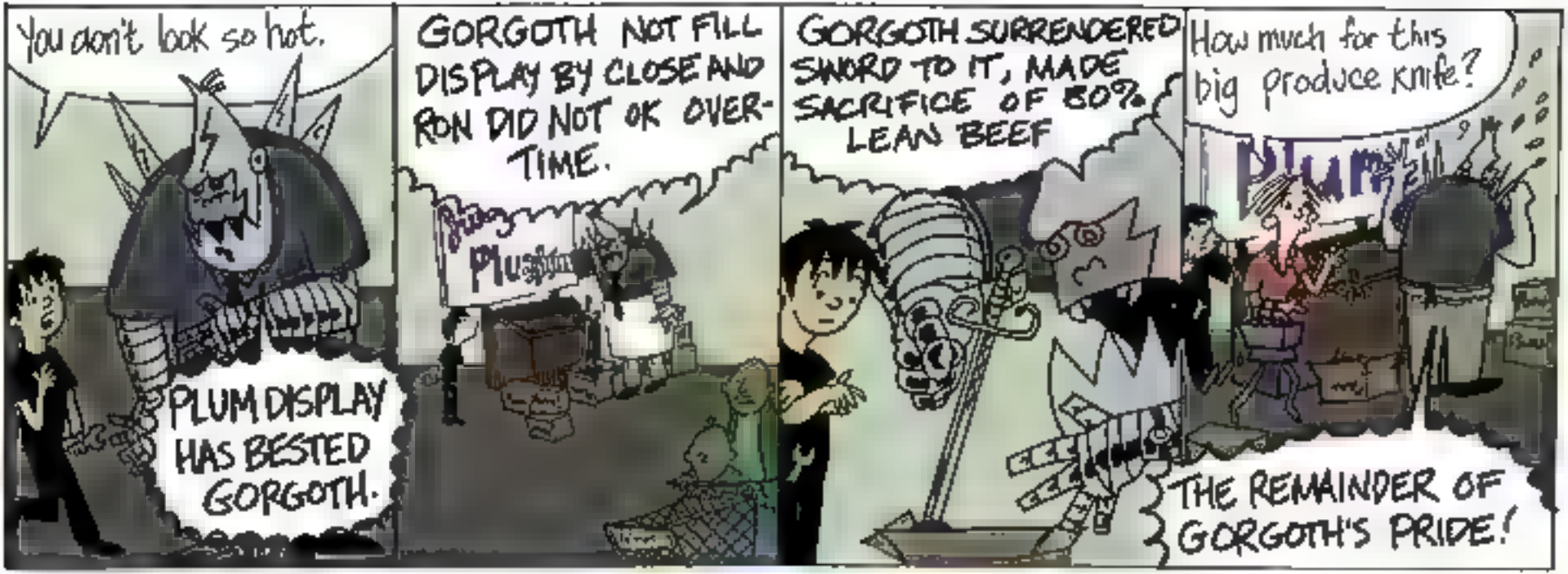

Dominating is his PURPOSE. He feels empty without it
Can we find any robots nearby who WANT to be ruled?
There used to be a government listing, but the plug got pulled!
Dang it, we need a loophole.
D'ya think it'd work to just get him enough plants?
Okay, what kind of job involves PLANT DOMINATION?
Gorgoth! You wanna manage grocery store produce?
GORGOTH TRY ANY-THING TO EASE HURT INSIDE GORGOTH.


What grocery store is gonna hire a METAL GORILLA built for PAIN?
One that can't see him
There are plenty of Clueless who'll edit out the weirdness.
We need a whole shopful of them.
Right we're looking for the most insipid, banal, soul-deadening store we can find
Valmart
SUPERCENTER
Yesss...
Never let it be said there aren't benefits


So, Gorgoth Any management experience?
THAT GOOD QUESTION MR. KEESHAN.
GORGOTH WAS BORN IN FIRES OF RAGE AND HATE HIS ONE PURPOSE IS TO RULE.
GORGOTH LIVES TO BEND WILL OF HIS ENEMIES BENEATH HIS CRUEL LASH.
Okay, sounds like a yes.
GORGOTH WILL PICK UP THE CUP OF PENCILS HE SPILLED.


Valmart
Wow!
Congratulations Gorgoth!
GORGOTH IS NOW MINIMUM WAGE EMPLOYEE!
Any challenges thus far?
THE MELONS ARE PLOTTING AGAINST GORGOTH
Sorry, how—
HUSH, LEST YOU BE CLEFT BY NIGHTRENDER
I need a cool name for my wrench.
THEN GORGOTH SHRINK-WRAPS HALVES AND SELLS THEM AT MARK UP.

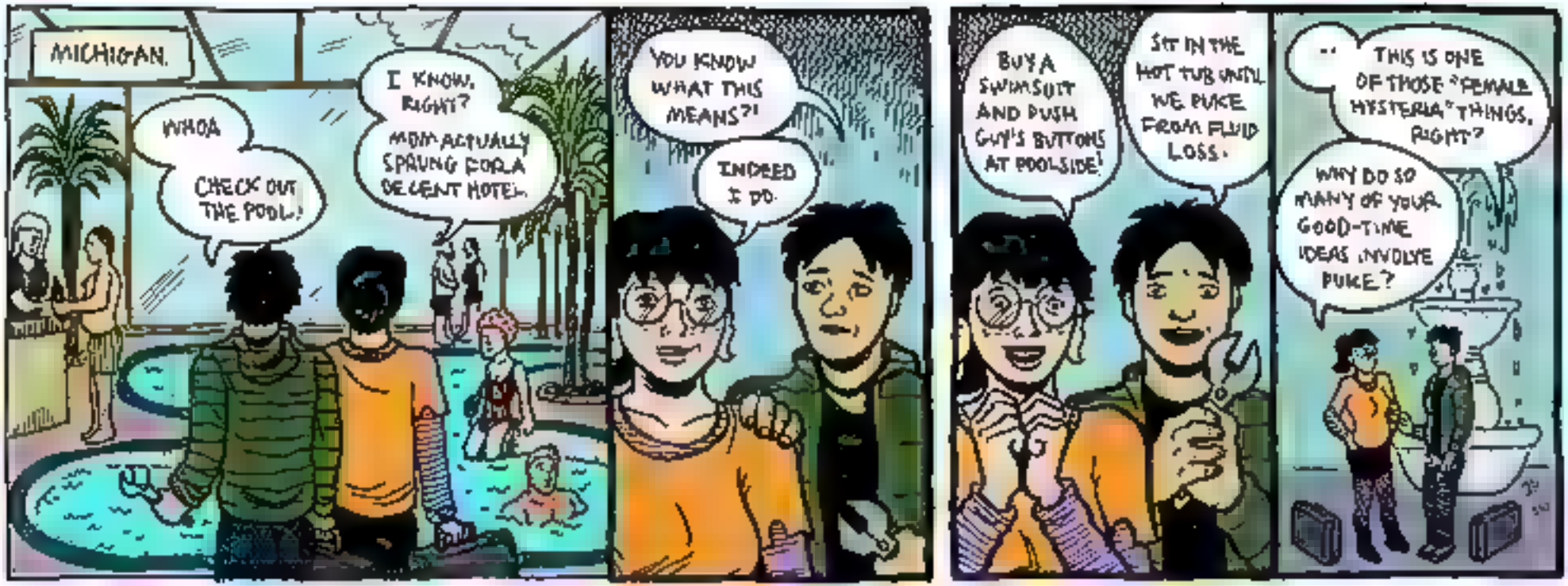

Excuse me, but these avocadoes are terrible.
DOES HUMAN WISH TO KNOW WHAT IS TERRIBLE?
GORGOTH MAKES SURE LETTUCE IS FILLED BUT THEN CORN RUNS OUT
WHEN GORGOTH TENDS CORN, HUMANS PURCHASE ALL LETTUCE!
I want to make guacamole, see
DIP YOUR CHIPS IN BLOOD OF FOES INSTEAD!
I'm not looking for recipe suggestions

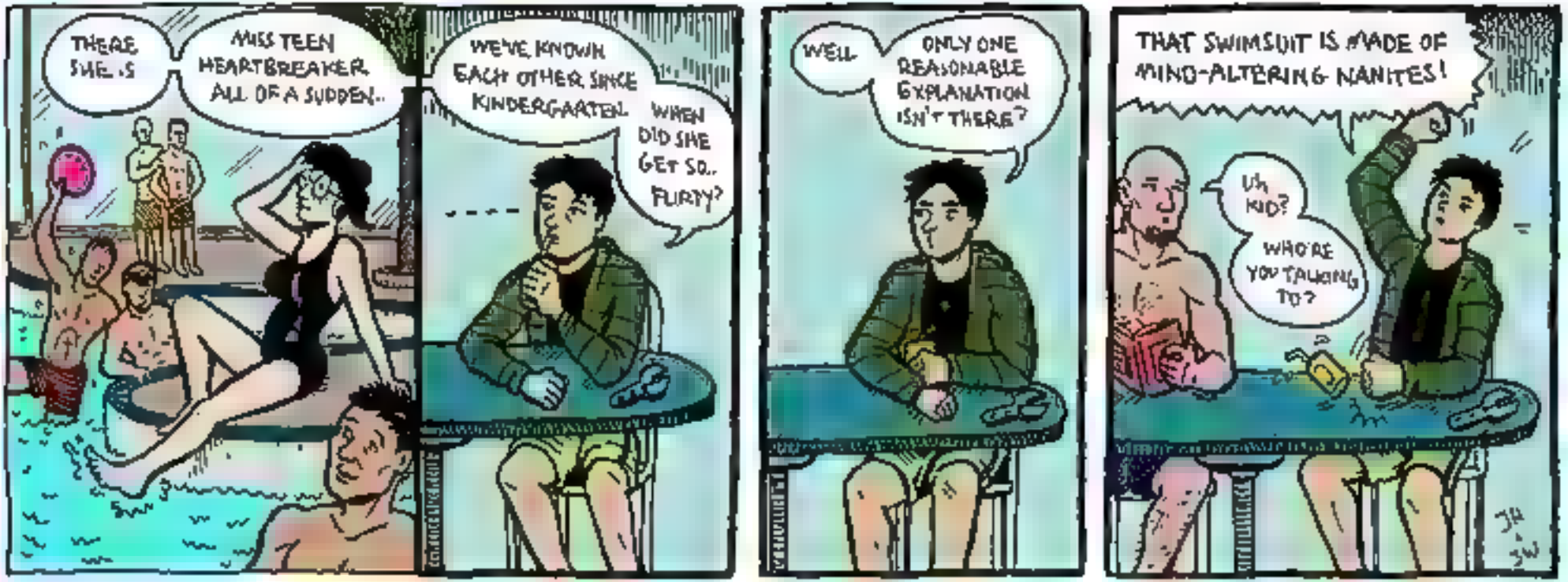

You don't look so hot.
PLUM DISPLAY HAS BESTED GORGOTH.
GORGOTH NOT FILL DISPLAY BY CLOSE AND RON DID NOT OK OVER-TIME.
GORGOTH SURRENDERED SWORD TO IT, MADE SACRIFICE OF 80% LEAN BEEF
How much for this big produce knife?
THE REMAINDER OF GORGOTH'S PRIDE!


Sorry the grocery gig didnt work out for you, Gorgoth
GORGOTH TRIED SO HARD
GORGOTH WILL HAVE TO BE HAPPY ENSLAVING WHEAT
Excuse me, but I gotta harvest this.
WHAT... WHAT WILL GORGOTH ENSLAVE?
Aint my concern. Get your own wheat.
You could have at least gotten him a perennial
The garden store was really picked over

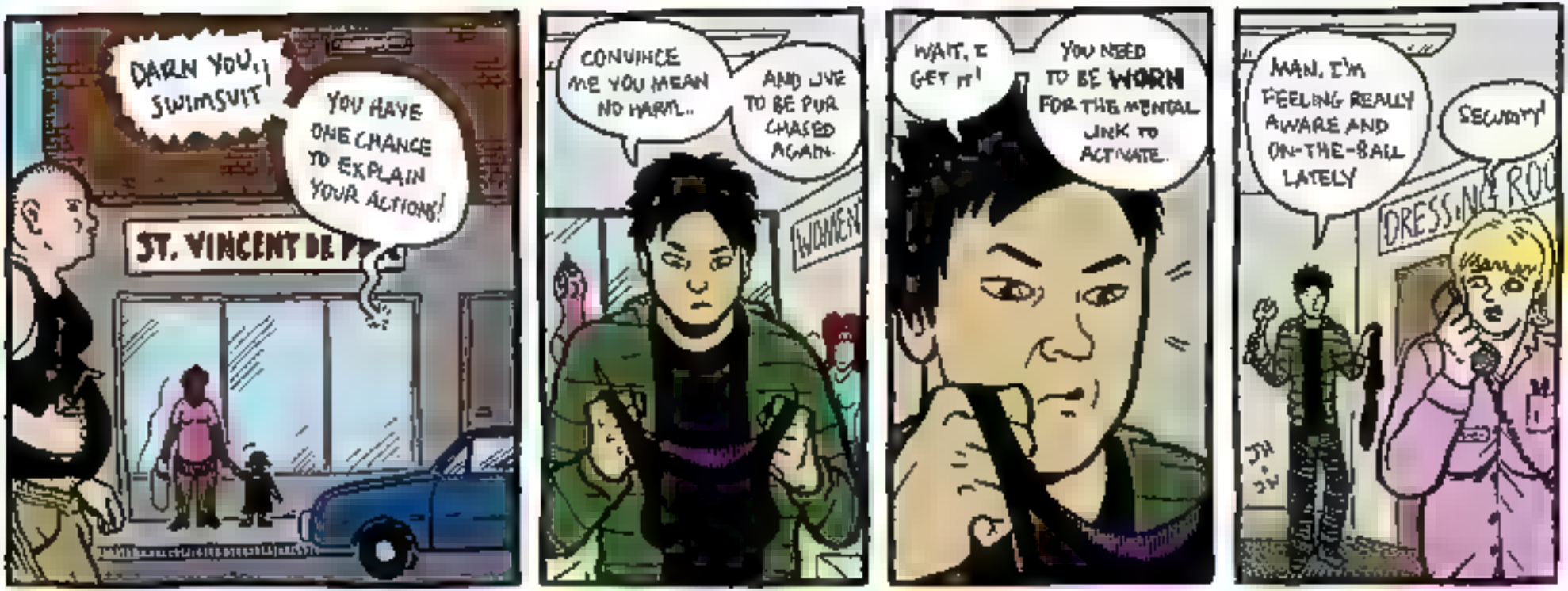

Well, true believers, we tried. We just don't have the resources to help creatures like Gorgoth.
But even though we left him a little better than we found him, I found his enthusiasm infectious.
Kneel! Kneel before JONAH YU, Prince of all Hot Pockets!
As did my co-author, who will be 30% less bearable from now on.
HOW DARE YOU LEAK BUBBLING CHEESE ON JONAH'S PLATE!



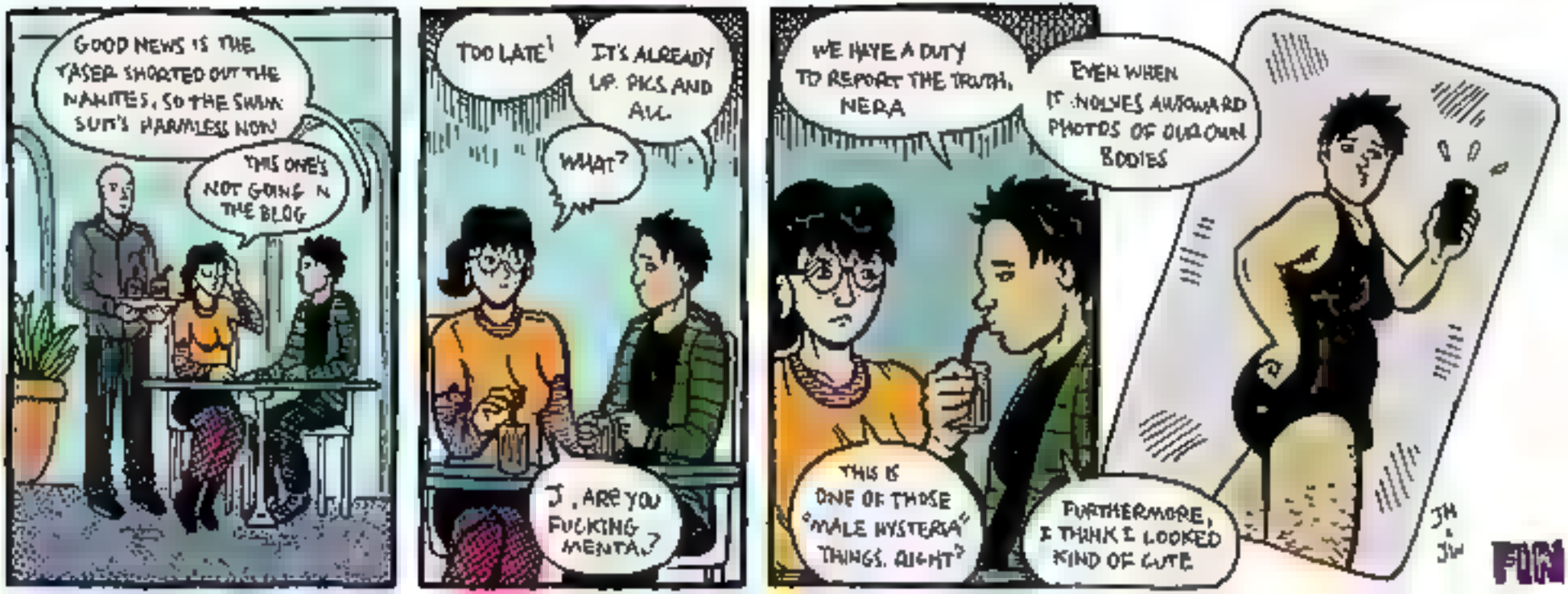

MICHIGAN.
WHOA
CHECK OUT THE POOL!
I KNOW, RIGHT?
MOM ACTUALLY SPRUNG FOR A DECENT HOTEL.
YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS?!
INDEED I DO.
BUY A SWIMSUIT AND PUSH GUY'S BUTTONS AT POOLSIDE!
SIT IN THE HOT TUB UNTIL WE PUKE FROM FLUID LOSS.
..
THIS IS ONE OF THOSE "FEMALE HYSTERIA" THINGS, RIGHT?
WHY DO SO MANY OF YOUR GOOD-TIME IDEAS INVOLVE PUKE?

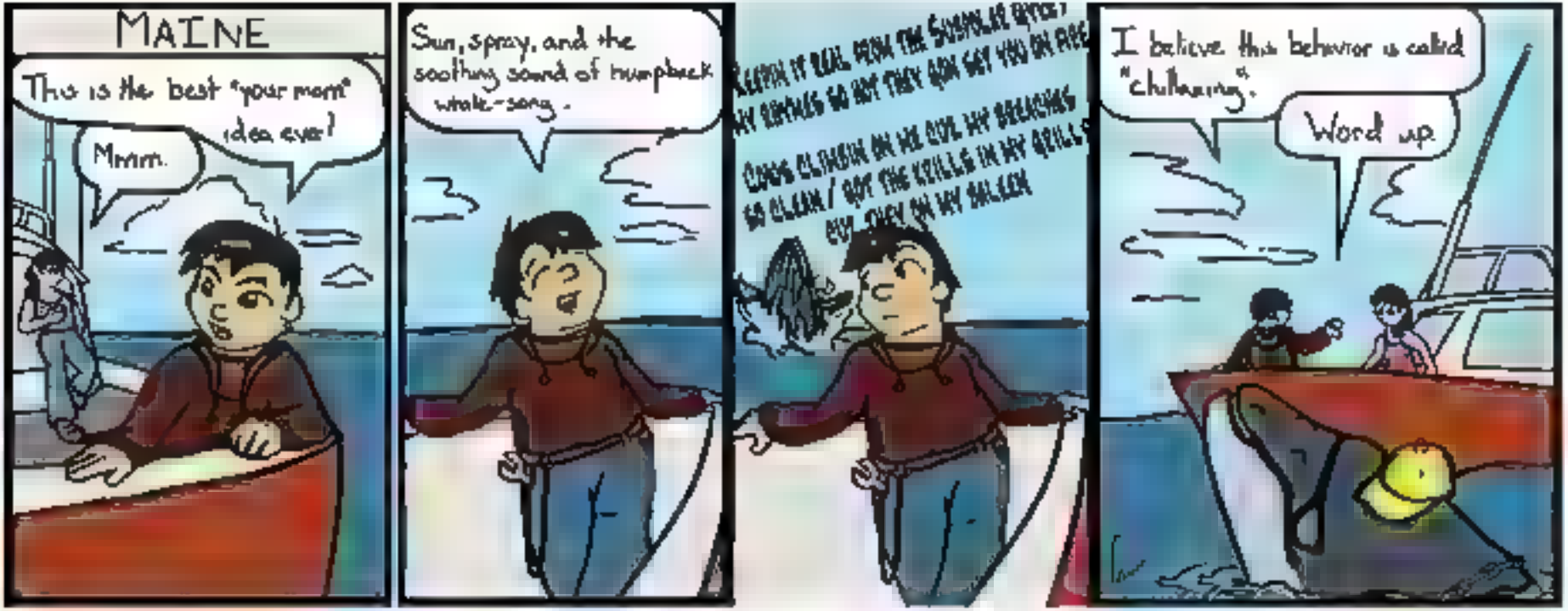

THERE SHE IS
MISS TEEN HEARTBREAKER ALL OF A SUDDEN..
WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER SINCE KINDERGARTEN
WHEN DID SHE GET SO.. FURRY?
WELL
ONLY ONE REASONABLE EXPLANATION ISN'T THERE?
THAT SWIMSUIT IS MADE OF MIND-ALTERING NANITES!
UH KID?
WHO'RE YOU TALKING TO?


THAT SWIMSUIT THING WAS FUN, BUT IT WASN'T REALLY ME
OF COURSE IT WASN'T YOU! YOU WERE UNDER ITS SWAY.
IT FEELS LIKE I'M THROWING MONEY AWAY. MAYBE YOU CAN RUN IT TO ST VINNIE'S
OR I'LL DESTROY IT!
NERA, IT WAS EVEN GETTING TO ME!
J., CAN'T YOU MAYBE ACCEPT THAT IT WAS HORMONES?
I KEEP TELLING YOU, I DON'T HAVE ANY
EXCEPT WHATEVER HORMONES MAKE YOU THINK HIGHLANDER IS GOOD.
WELL, YEAH... EVERYBODY'S GOT THOSE!

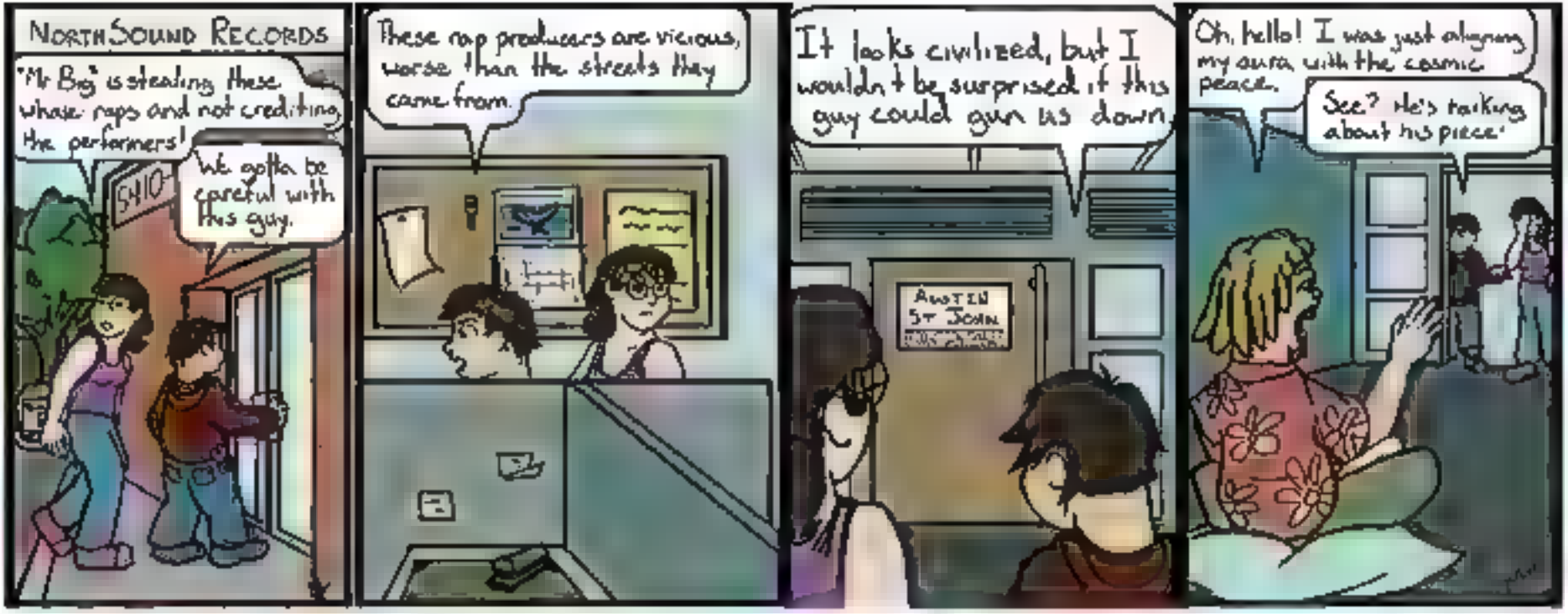

DARN YOU, SWIMSUIT
YOU HAVE ONE CHANCE TO EXPLAIN YOUR ACTION!
ST. VINCENT DE P
CONVINCE ME YOU MEAN NO HARM..
AND I'VE TO BE PUR CHASED AGAIN.
WOMEN
WAIT, I GET IT!
YOU NEED TO BE WORN FOR THE MENTAL JINK TO ACTIVATE.
MAN, I'M FEELING REALLY AWARE AND ON-THE-BALL LATELY
SECURITY!
DRESSING RO
JH
JW

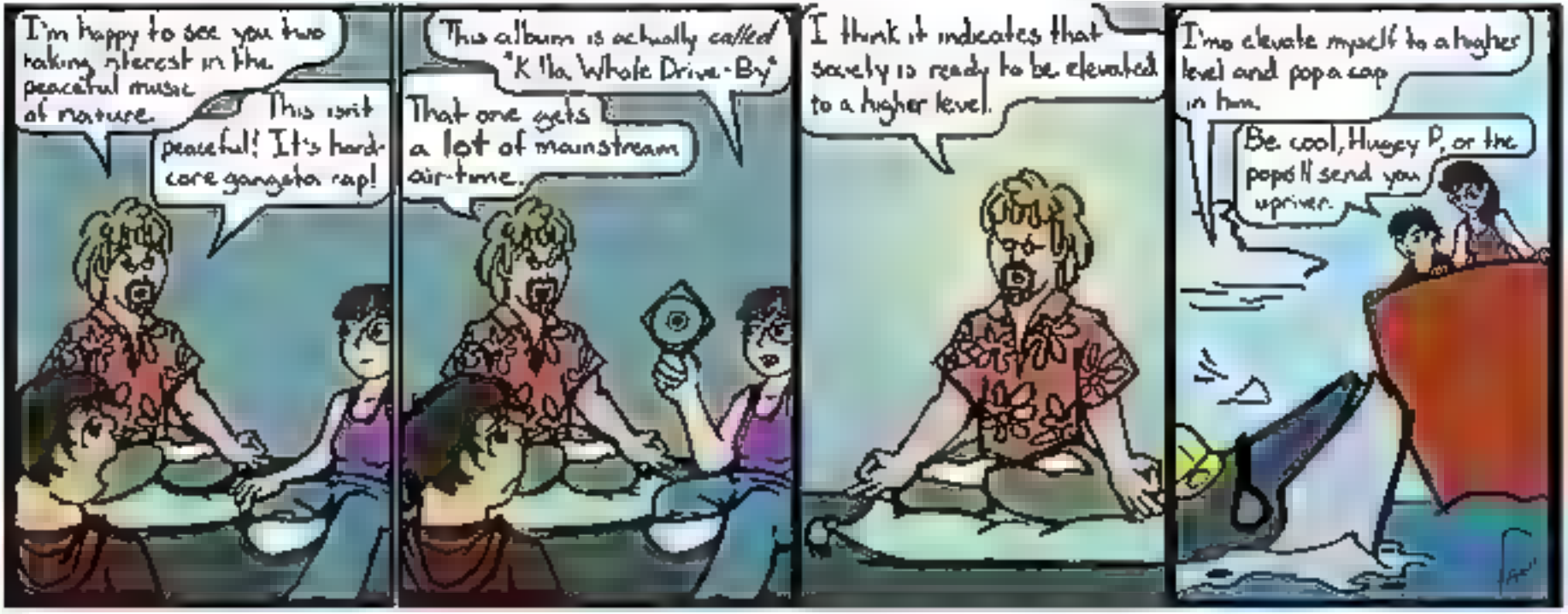

Congratulations. You have deduced my creator's evil plan
I KNEW IT!
YOU ENSLAVE THE MINDS OF MEN BY USING INNOCENT GIRLS AS YOUR VESSEL
Yes. But now I will use you instead.
HA!
I'LL LOOK TOO RIDICULOUS TO INFLUENCE ANYONE!
Curse you, Jonah Yu!
DRESSING ROOM NO. 15
dark entity.. You have you have no power here...
RIGHT. I'M GETTING THE TALER


GOOD NEWS IS THE TASER SHORTED OUT THE NANITES, SO THE SWINE SUIT'S HARMLESS NOW
THIS ONE'S NOT GOING IN THE BLOG
TOO LATE!
IT'S ALREADY UP. PICS AND ALL.
WHAT?
J, ARE YOU FUCKING MENTAL?
WE HAVE A DUTY TO REPORT THE TRUTH, NERA
EVEN WHEN IT INVOLVES AWKWARD PHOTOS OF OUR OWN BODIES
THIS IS ONE OF THOSE "MALE HYSTERIA" THINGS, RIGHT?
FURTHERMORE, I THINK I LOOKED KIND OF CUTE
JH & JW
FUN


MAINE
This is the best "your mom" idea ever!
Mmm.
Sun, spray, and the soothing sound of humpback whale-song.
I believe this behavior is called "challenging".
Word up.


This is great! Somebody taught the whale to rap like Hugey P!
Why you buggin, nigga? Hugey P's the freeak dreak.
You don't mean...
You lookin' at him! Mr Big be keepin' us calves from the 207 down
Oh my crap. Nera Hugey P is a humpback whale!
Mr Big ganked our rhyme flow, makin' the benjamins for himself
In retrospect, the lyrics about women's tails should have tipped us off.
I like big flukes and I cannot lie.


NORTH SOUND RECORDS
"Mr Big" is stealing these whose raps and not crediting the performers!
We gotta be careful with this guy.
These rap producers are vicious, worse than the streets they came from.
It looks civilized, but I wouldn't be surprised if this guy could gun us down.
AUSTIN ST JOHN
Oh, hello! I was just aligning my aura with the cosmic peace.
See? He's talking about his piece!


I'm happy to see you two taking interest in the peaceful music of nature.
This isn't peaceful! It's hard-core gangsta rap!
This album is actually called "K Ila Whole Drive-By"
That one gets a lot of mainstream air-time.
I think it indicates that sawely is ready to be elevated to a higher level.
I'mo elevate myself to a higher level and pop a cap in him.
Be cool, Huggy P, or the popo'll send you upriver.

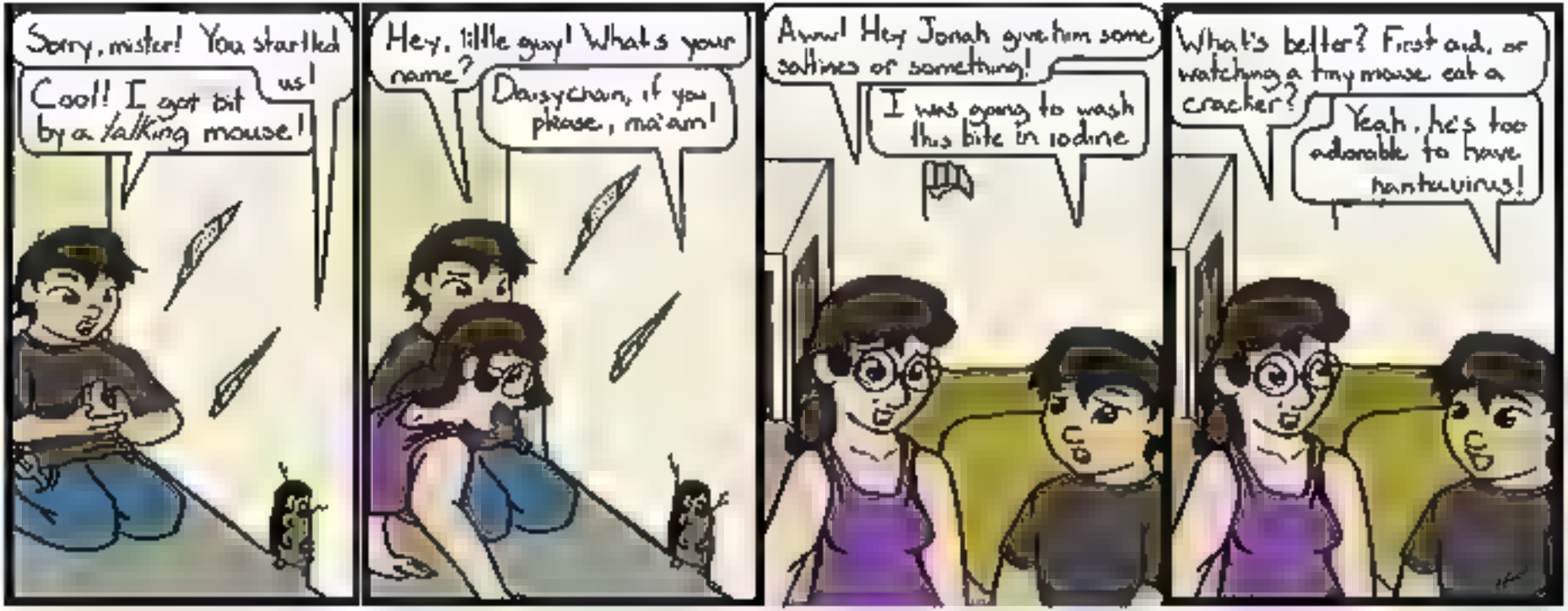



Turns out Mr. Big is what we call "Clueless"
Dang straight he is
Listen. It means he literally thinks he's selling normal whale-song C.Ds.
How do we get a real contract for Hugey P?
Dunno. All the federal nonhuman legal assistance pages are down.
Don't want no feds up here finding my stash anyway
Your stash of what, exactly?
Whalebone
I'm a regulated substance, playa.


Bugey P is a talented rapper who isn't getting his due just because he's a 40-ton sea mammal.
It's not rational, but I can't help but thinking that somehow America failed this guy
He wants to be our creative, intelletual equal. Why do we get I P. rights on our stuff while he doesn't?
I was poking around in this mouse hole with my bare hand and something bit me!
Then again, I don't understand why he wants to be our intellectual equal, either

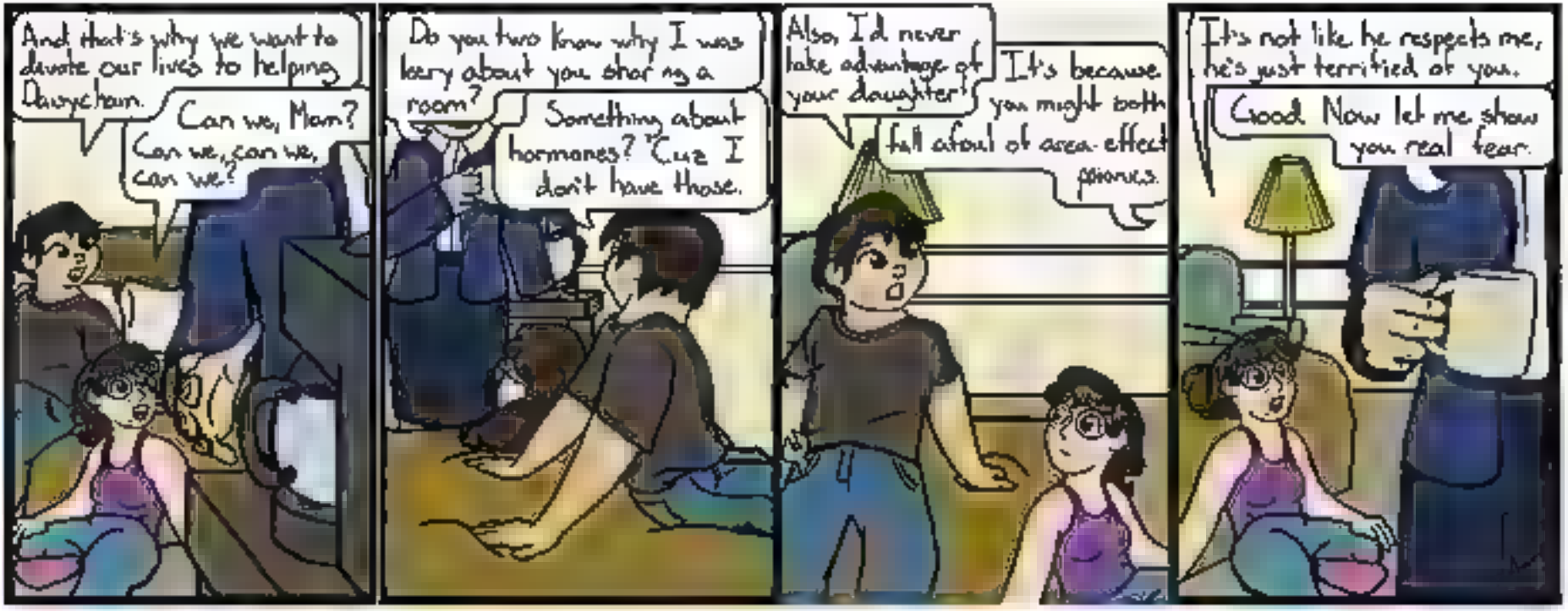
MECHANICAL/CYBORG APES for SKIN-HORSE



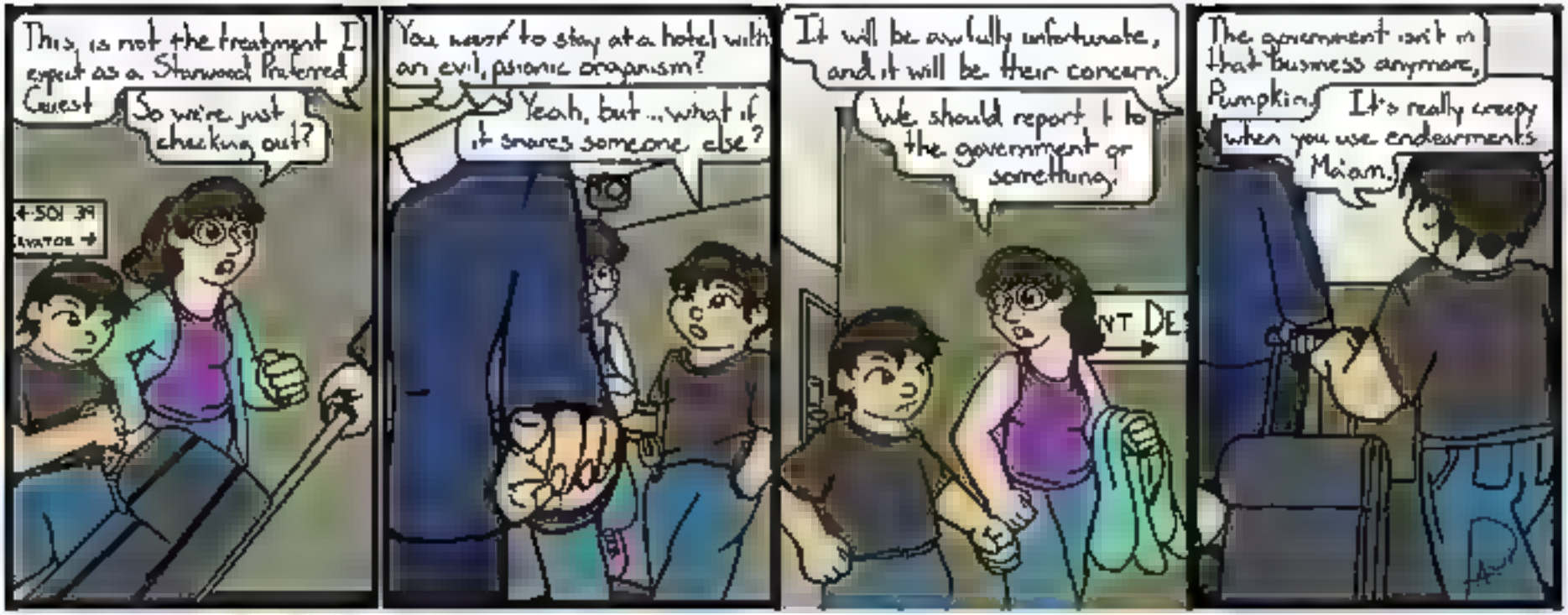

Sorry, mister! You startled us!
Cool! I got bit by a talking mouse!
Hey, little guy! What's your name?
Daisychain, if you please, ma'am!
Awww! Hey Jonah give him some saltines or something!
I was going to wash this bite in iodine
What's better? First aid, or watching a tiny mouse eat a cracker?
Yeah, he's too adorable to have hantavirus!


Those peanuts were delicious, Miss!
Quick, get him something else to eat!
We're kinda out of snacks.
Okay, I'll run to a convenience store.
If you're sure it wouldn't be any trouble
Anything for a cute little guy like you!
Well, if anything, could you score up some Perrier?
Aww, that would sound sinister if he wasn't so cute!


Okay, finished shelling all these Brazil nuts!
Great! Feed 'em into the hole here
Next, you can submit this bill to your human lawmakers.
"Be it resolved that feral cats are a nuisance animal."
and should all be shot with human rifles"?
But we don't live here. Lawmakers only care what locals think.
We guess it was too much to ask that you'd uproot your lives.
We'll move here permanently! Just don't make that face!


And that's why we want to devote our lives to helping Daisychain.
Can we, Mom? Can we, can we, can we?
Do you two know why I was leery about you staying a room?
Something about hormones? 'Cuz I don't have those.
Also, I'd never take advantage of your daughter!
It's because you might both fall afoul of area-effect glances.
It's not like he respects me, he's just terrified of you.
Good. Now let me show you real fear.


See? Not a mouse. A single organism made up of mice.
Hey! Let us go!
Ewww.
This is one axon of a huge agglomerate brain of fearsome power
How powerful are we talking?
Powerful enough to bend the will of weak-minded children
Hey! We're not weak minded!
This from the kid who eats the drying packet in his beef jerky.
I don't like the Man telling me what I can and can't eat.


This is not the treatment I expect as a Starwood Preferred Guest
So we're just checking out?
You want to stay at a hotel with an evil, psionic organism?
Yeah, but ...what if it snares someone else?
It will be awfully unfortunate, and it will be their concern.
We should report it to the government or something.
The government isn't in that business anymore, Pumpkin.
It's really creepy when you use endearments Miam.




BURBANK.
GUESS IT'S TRUE WORKING FOR WHIMSY RUINS YOU FOR OTHER JOBS
HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?
I WAS DOING SOME V.O. WORK AT THE LITTLE HOUSE IN ILLINOIS. TWO WEEKS LATER, I WAKE UP HALF-SKUNK.
RADIATION EXPOSURE; THEY SAID OBVIOUSLY, IT RAISES SOME QUESTIONS.
WORKPLACE SAFETY ONES?
"WHO CHANGED THE FLIPPIN' RADIATION RULES?" ONES.
OKAY TO EXPLAIN: RADIATION IS BASICALLY MAGIC.


FASCINATING. YOU'RE ACTUALLY TRANSITIONING FROM CLUELESS TO CLUEFUL.
WELL, I'D LIKE TO "TRANSIT.ON" BACK.
I GOT A CARD FORTH S SELF-HELP PROGRAM. YOU'RE WELCOME TO COME ALONG
THINK YOURSELF HUMAN?
VIA ACTIVE DENIAL, I'LL BE BACK TO THE NORMAL WORLD IN NO TIME
MS. ANIWYE, YOUR MACCHIATO
THANK YOU, PATCH OF EMPTY AIR HOLDING MY COFFEE
A BELIEF-BASED WAY TO A NEW, INSUFFERABLE YOU.
tea 20.4


WELCOME TO "THINK YOURSELF HUMAN I'M MS. GRIMALKIN, AND I AM A HUMAN BEING.
ACTUALLY
YOU CAN DO IT!
SO WHAT'S WITH YOU BEING A CAT?
I'M AFRAID YOU ARE MISTAKEN. I AM AN EX-NONHUMAN
tea 2014
BUT YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY GOT WHISKERS AND STUFF, RIGHT?
NO
SHUT UP JONAN SHUT UP
OKAY, BUT-
HUSH OR I'LL CLAW YOUR FACE OFF
MELEE IN 4...3...2..

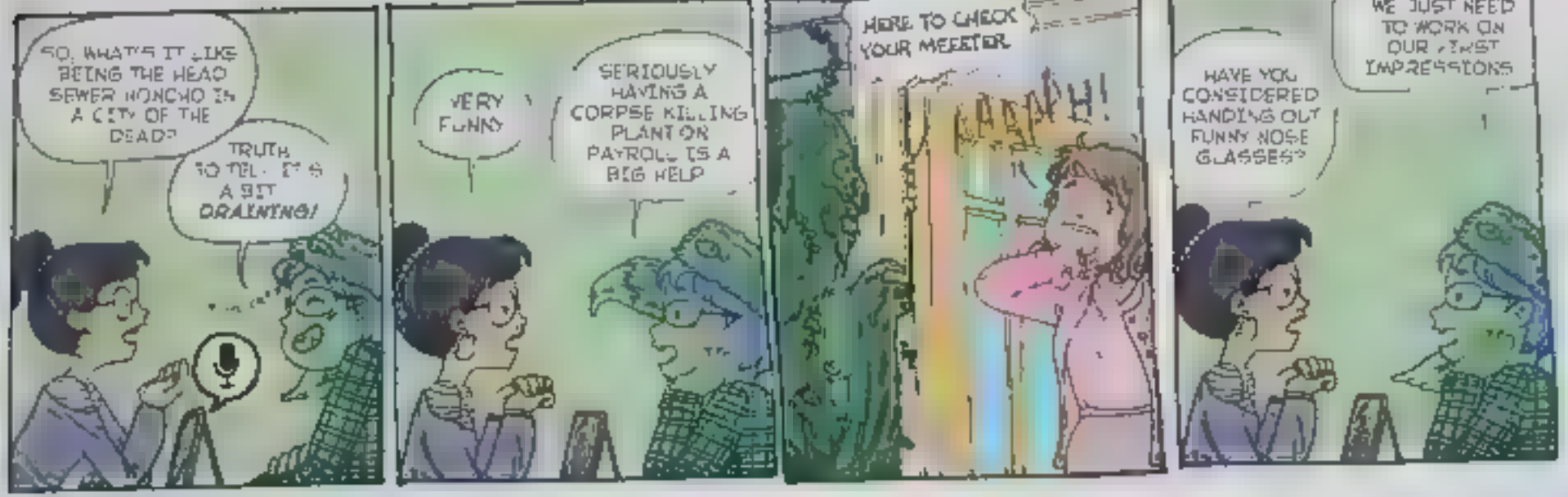

I WAS LOOKING FOR ADVICE THAT ACTUALLY WORKED
OUR METHODS ARE 100% EFFECTIVE 40% OF THE TIME
BUT I'VE STILL GOT PROBLEMS CONTROLLING MY INSTINCTS!
HUMANS DON'T HAVE INSTINCTS, YOU MALODOROUS TWIT!
I SHOULD JUST DO A HAND STAND AND SPRAY YOU RIGHT NOW!
EAT CLAW RAKE, MUSTELID!
YEP TYPICAL SELF-HELP GROUP
MY HUMAN INSTINCTS ARE DRAWING ME TOWARD THE SNACK TABLE
GROWL
MEOW
HISS
CRASH
SRRAH
YOWL
BITEY BITE
SNAP
bea 2014

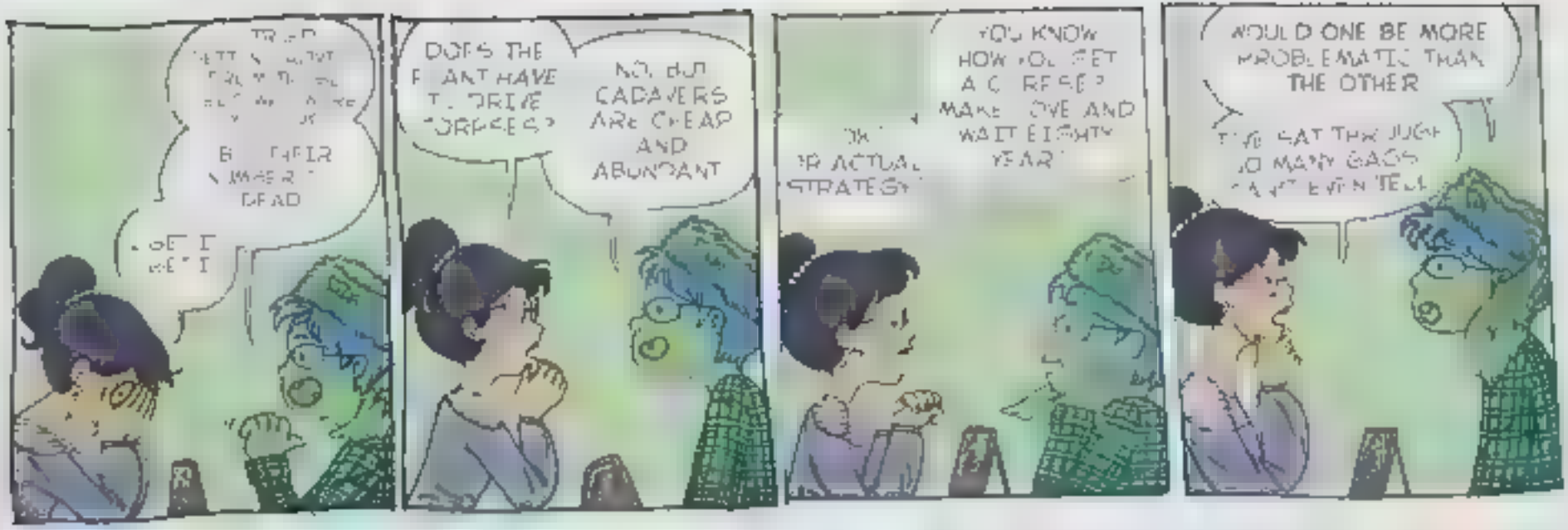

GOTTA SAY, MY DENIAL SUPPORT GROUP ISN'T WORKING OUT
STILL, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE
THE FEDS USED TO HAVE A PROGRAM BUT IT'S SHUT DOWN THEN THERE'S THIS "HEY RUBE" THING
GAH! I JUST WANT TO NOT CONSTANTLY BE BAFFLED BY THE WEIRDNESS AROUND ME!
NO OFFENSE, MA'AM, BUT MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE PICKED CALIFORNIA
SURE I'LL GO WORK IN NEBRASKA'S BUSTLING FILM INDUSTRY.
TED 2014


HEY AGAIN, INTERNET
H T OF "HEY RJBE"
YES NOT A ZOMBIE
I'VE HEARD A LOT OF YOU SAY THAT EVEN IN A POST-PROP 39 WORLD, YOU STILL FEEL LOST AND ALONE
JUST SO YOU KNOW, WHATEVER SHAPE YOU'RE IN, YOU'LL ALWAYS FIND "HEY RJBE" "PURRFECTLY" WELCOMING
CUT!
FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, RENARD TIGERS DON'T PURR
DOESN'T MATTER, CHIEF CAT PUNS ARE DYNAMITE



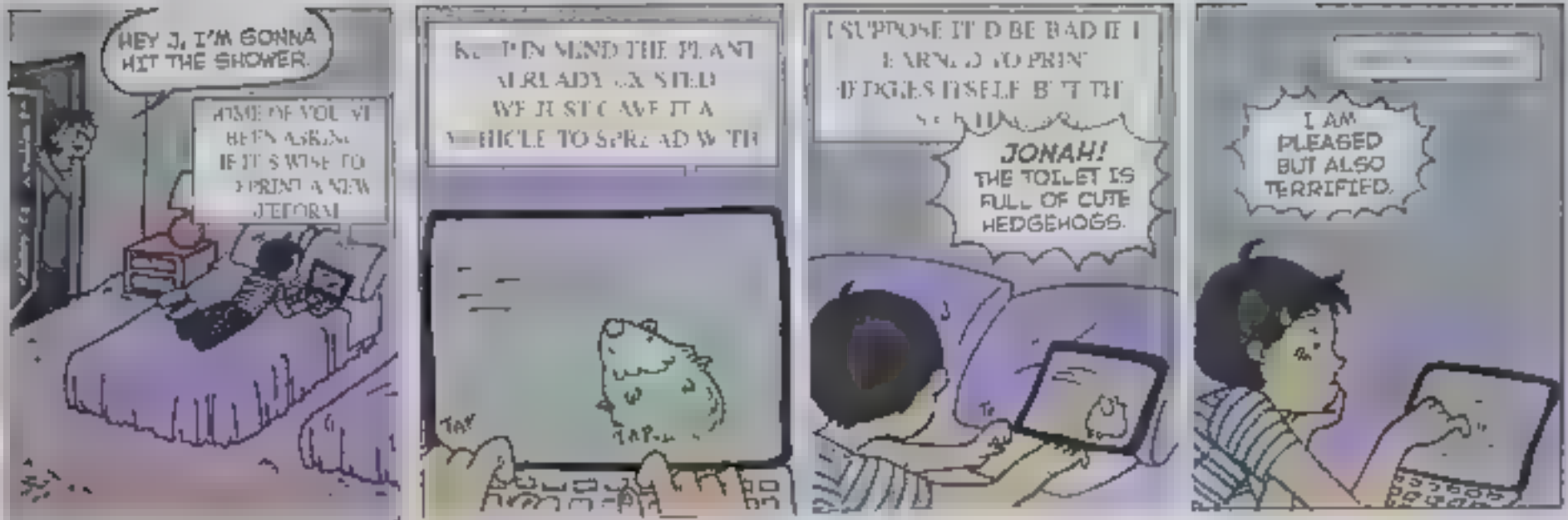

OUR NEXT STOP IS PALMA THE HEART OF THE ZOMBIE RIGHTS MOVEMENT
THE DEAD HAVE FOUND SOME ACCEPTANCE HERE BUT PREJUDICE IS A HARD HABIT TO BREAK
YHAAH!
IN LIKE JUST IT OF WARRANTY WONES WHICH BREAK LIKE RAINTOWN

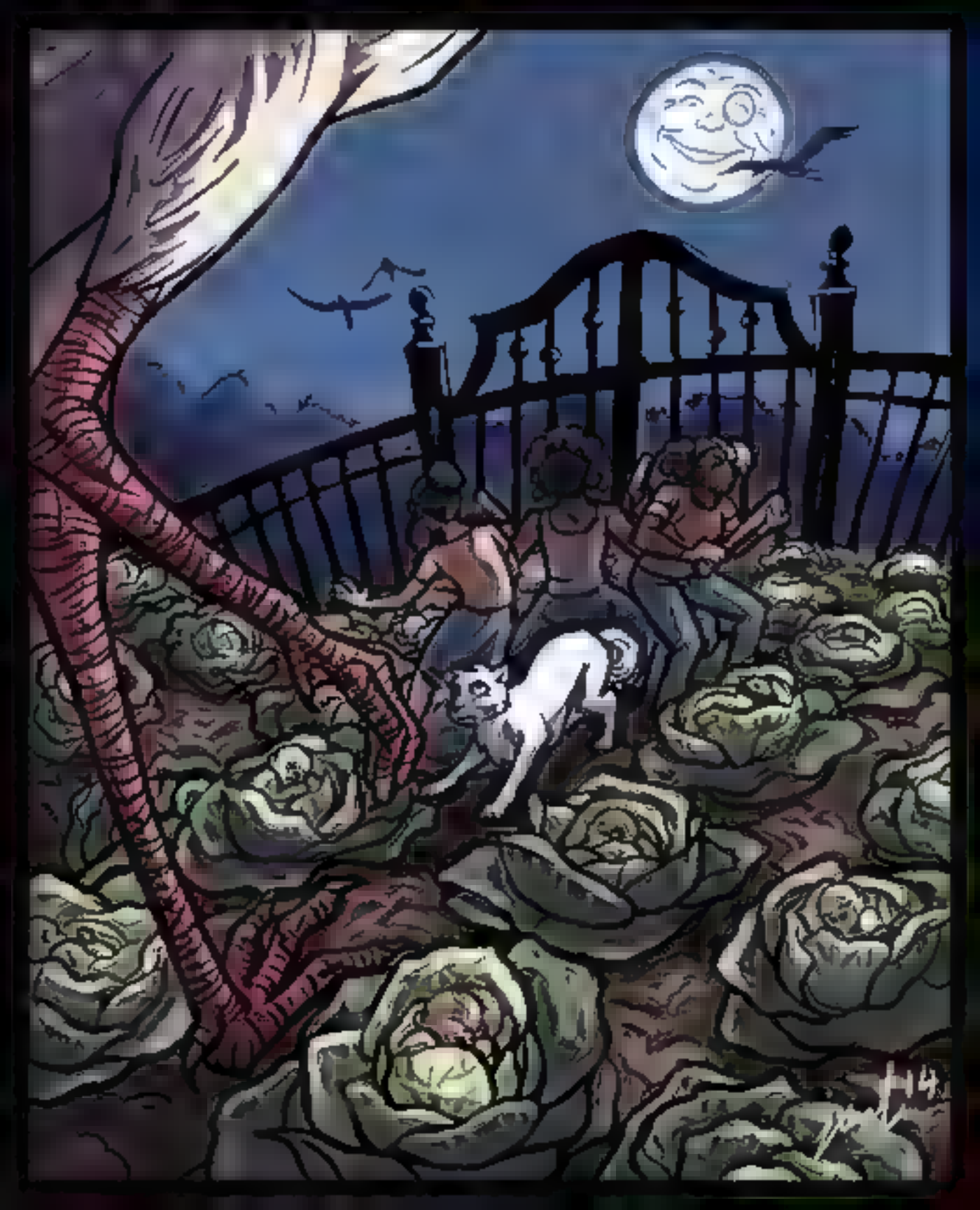

SO, WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING THE HEAD SEWER HONCHO IN A CITY OF THE DEAD?
TRUTH TO TELL, IT'S A BIT DRAINING!
VERY FUNNY
SERIOUSLY HAVING A CORPSE KILLING PLANT ON PAYROLL IS A BIG HELP
HERE TO CHECK YOUR METER.
HAVE YOU CONSIDERED HANDING OUT FUNNY NOSE GLASSES?
WE JUST NEED TO WORK ON OUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS

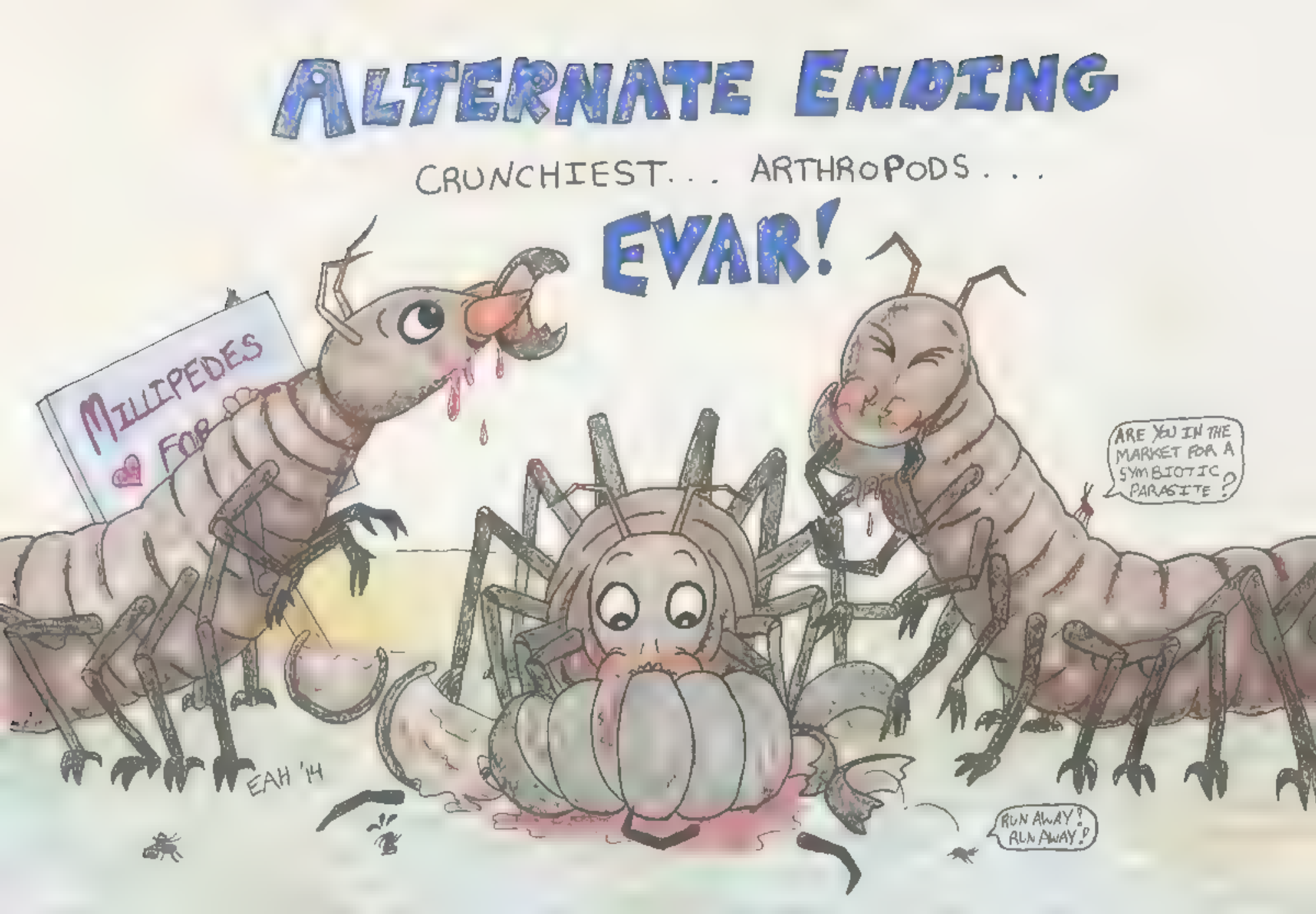

BUT THEIR NUMBER DEAD
DOES THE PLANT HAVE TO DRIVE CORPSES?
NO, BUT CADAVERS ARE CHEAP AND ABUNDANT
YOU KNOW HOW YOU GET A CORPSE? MAKE LOVE AND WAIT EIGHTY YEARS
WOULD ONE BE MORE PROBLEMATIC THAN THE OTHER


I USED NERA'S 3-D PRINTER TO WHIP UP AN ADORABLE CORPSE ALTERNATIVE
THAT IS IN NO WAY ADORABLE
HA DROP A PLANT RUNNER INTO THIS PILE OF PARTS
OKAY
SKUL?
SHE LIKED THE HEADLESS PAY UP
THAT IS IN EVERY WAY ADORABLE

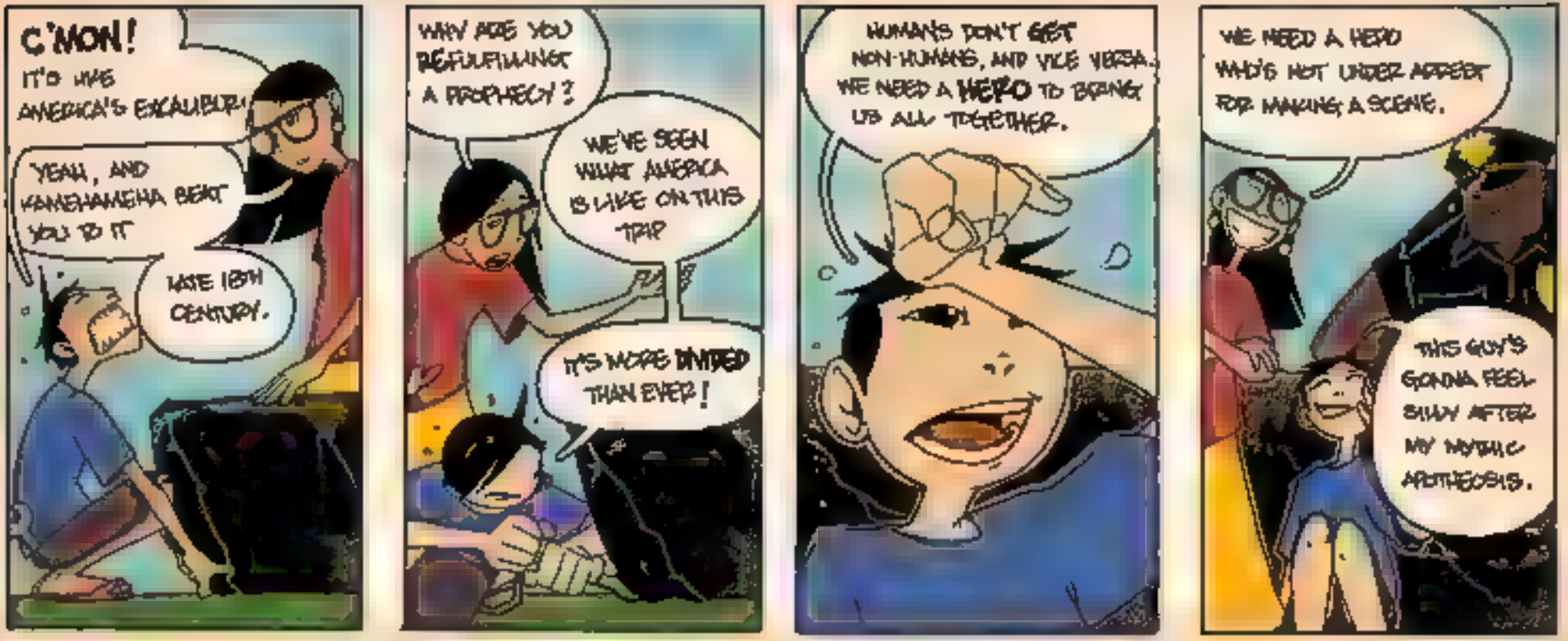

WHY OF COURSE YOU CAN CHECK MY METERE
PLANNING ON PROTE

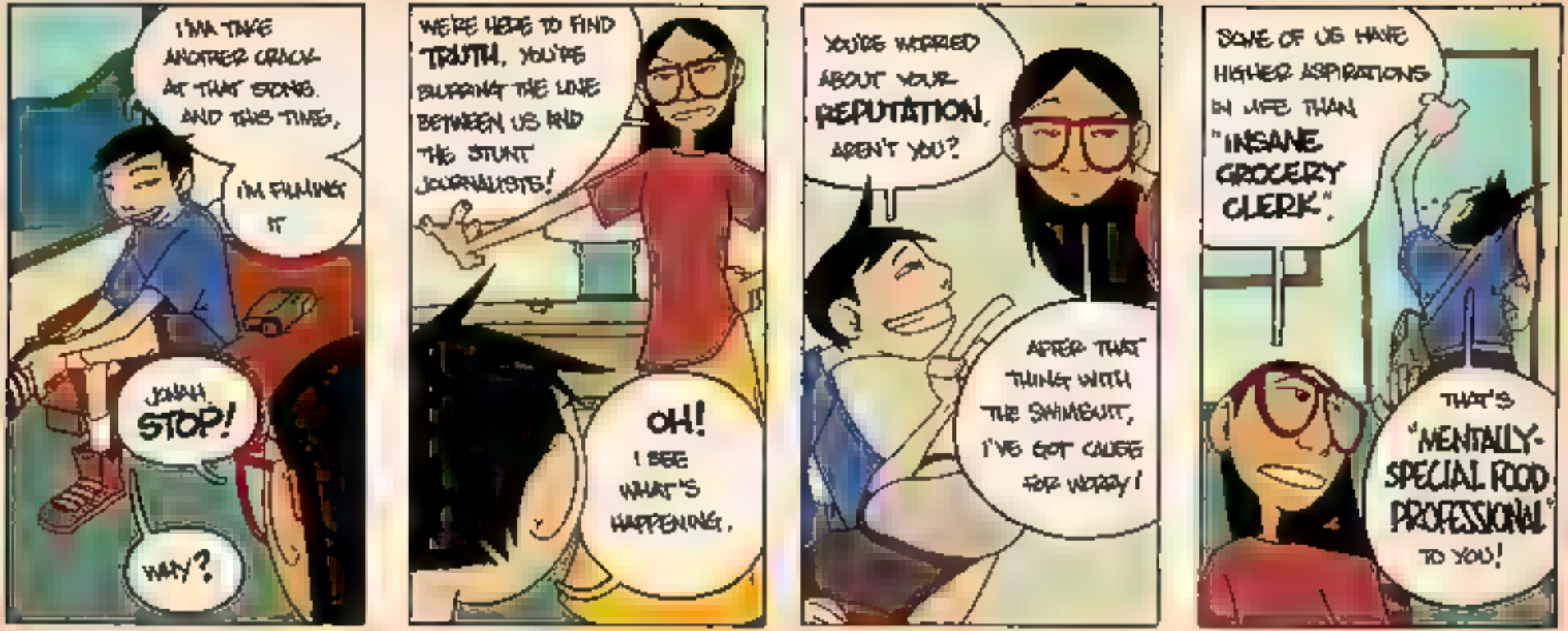

HEY J, I'M GONNA HIT THE SHOWER.
SOME OF YOU'VE BEEN ASKING IF IT'S WISE TO 3-PRINT A NEW JETFORM
KEEP IN MIND THE PLANT ALREADY EXISTED WE JUST GAVE IT A VEHICLE TO SPREAD WITH
TAP
TAP...
I SUPPOSE IT'D BE BAD IF I LEARNED TO PRINT HEDGES ITSELF BUT THE
JONAH! THE TOILET IS FULL OF CUTE HEDGEHOGS.
I AM PLEASED BUT ALSO TERRIFIED.

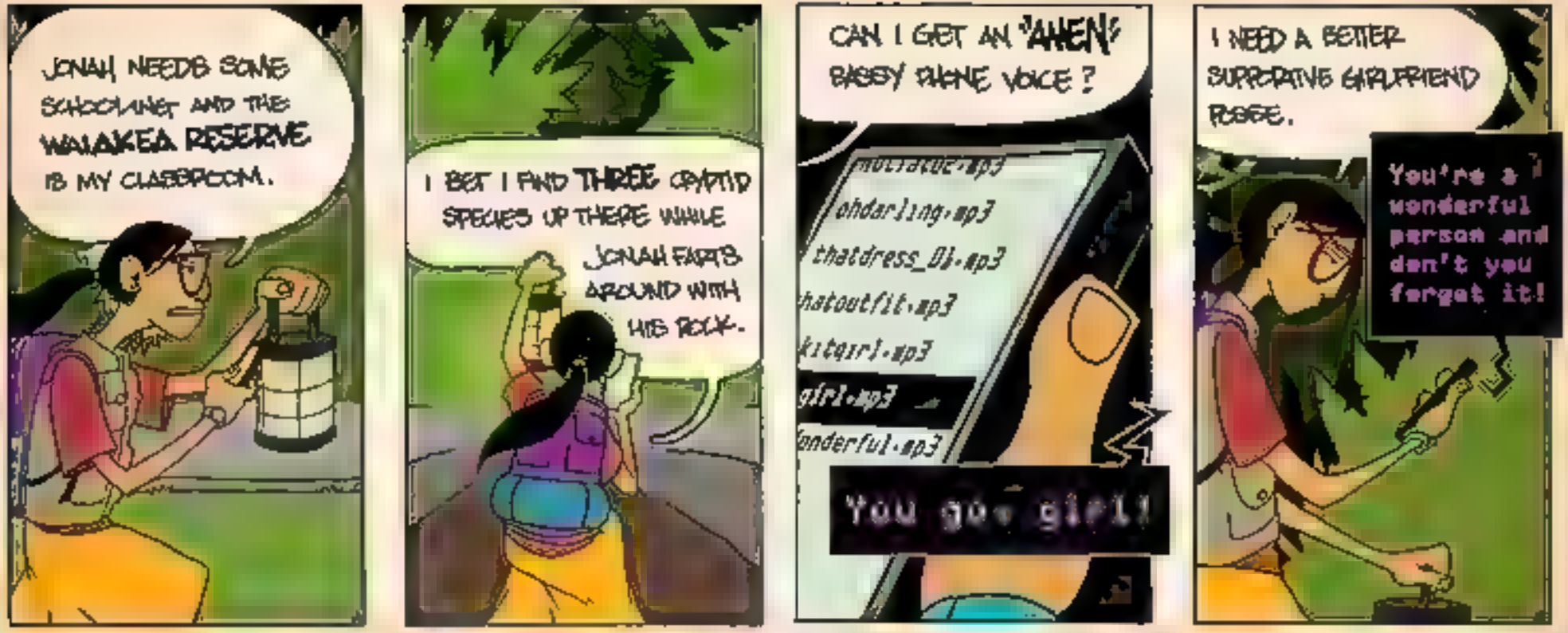



ALTERNATE ENDING
CRUNCHIEST... ARTHROPODS...
EVAR!
MILLIPEDES FOR
ARE YOU IN THE MARKET FOR A SYMBIOTIC PARASITE?
EAH '14
RUN AWAY! RUN AWAY!


I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW WE BOND-TRAVELED TO HAWAII.
NOT ME! I'VE GOT BIGGER-COGNITIVE-RISK TO PAY!
BEHOLD, THE NAHA STONE! ANCIENT RELIC OF THE HAWAIIAN PEOPLE!
SERIOUSLY, DID MOM DRAG US OR SOMETHING?
IT IS SAID THAT HE WHO CAN LIFT THE STONE WILL UNITE THE ISLANDS!
AREN'T THE ISLANDS ALREADY UNITED?
NOT HERE, WHERE IT MATTERS.
YOU'RE LUCKED HERE, WHERE IT MATTERS.

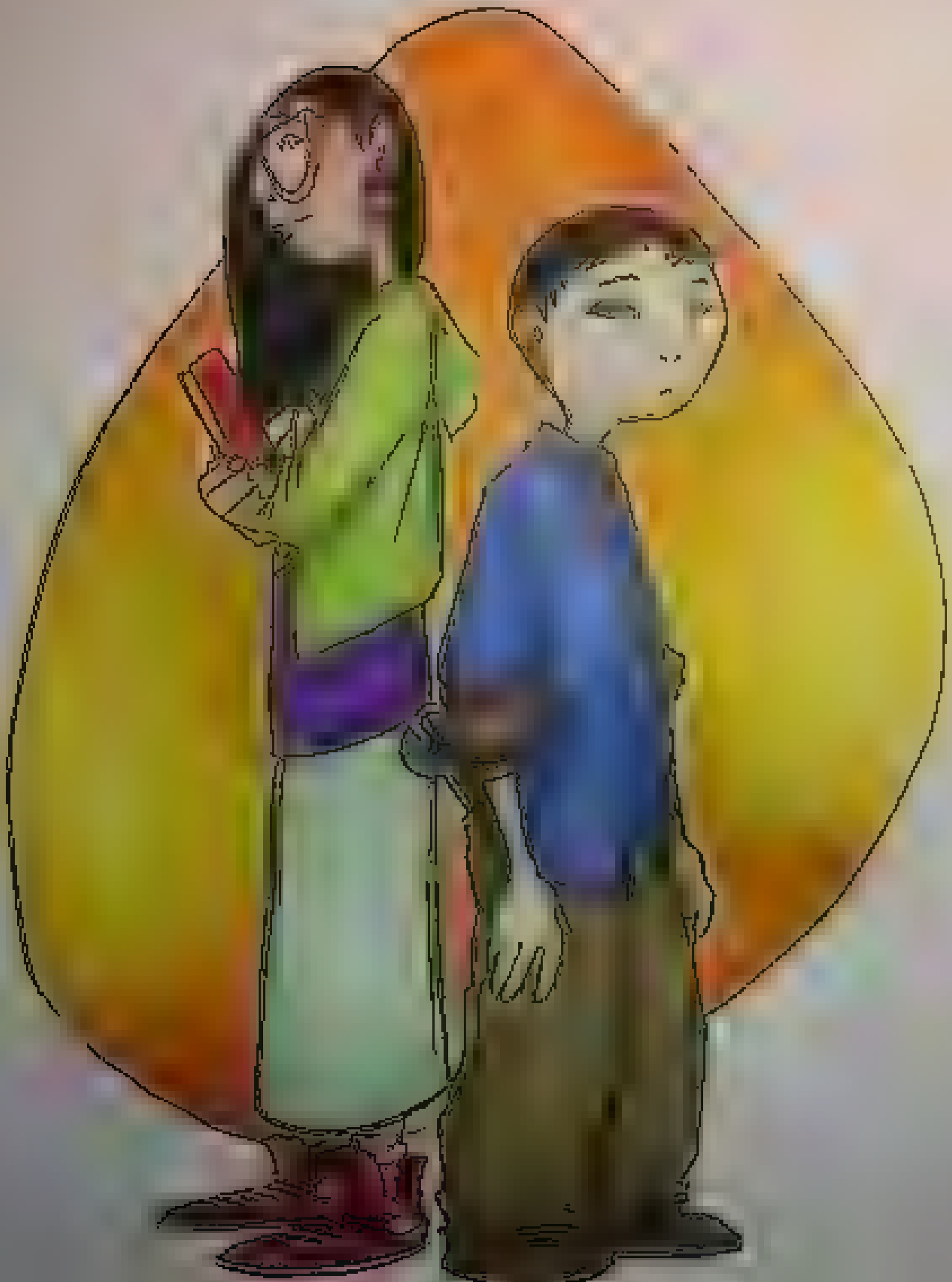

C'MON!
IT'D HAVE AMERICA'S EXCALIBUR!
YEAH, AND KAMEHAMEHA BEAT YOU TO IT
LATE 18TH CENTURY.
WHY ARE YOU REFULFILLING A PROPHECY?
WE'VE SEEN WHAT AMERICA IS LIKE ON THIS TRIP
IT'S MORE DIVIDED THAN EVER!
HUMANS DON'T GET NON-HUMANS, AND VICE VERSA. WE NEED A HERO TO BRING US ALL TOGETHER.
WE NEED A HERO WHO'S NOT UNDER ARREST FOR MAKING A SCENE.
THIS GUY'S GONNA FEEL SILLY AFTER MY MYTHIC APOTHEOSIS.

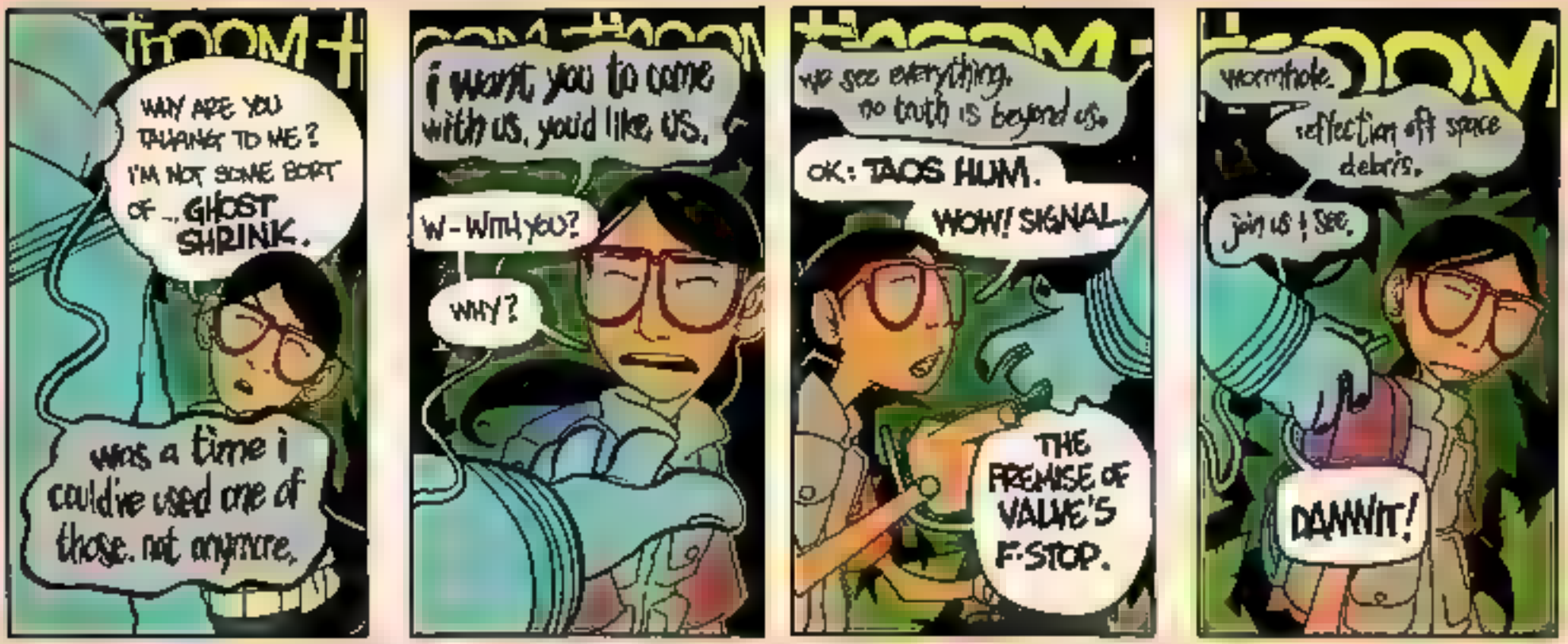

I'MA TAKE ANOTHER CRACK AT THAT SIGNAL. AND THIS TIME,
I'M FINISHER IT
JONAH, STOP!
WHY?
WE'RE HERE TO FIND TRUTH. YOU'RE BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN US AND THE STUNT JOURNALISTS!
OH! I SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING.
YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR REPUTATION, AREN'T YOU?
AFTER THAT THING WITH THE SWIMSUIT, I'VE GOT CALLUS FOR WORRY!
SOME OF US HAVE HIGHER ASPIRATIONS IN LIFE THAN "INSANE GROCERY CLERK".
THAT'S "MENTALLY-SPECIAL FOOD PROFESSIONAL" TO YOU!

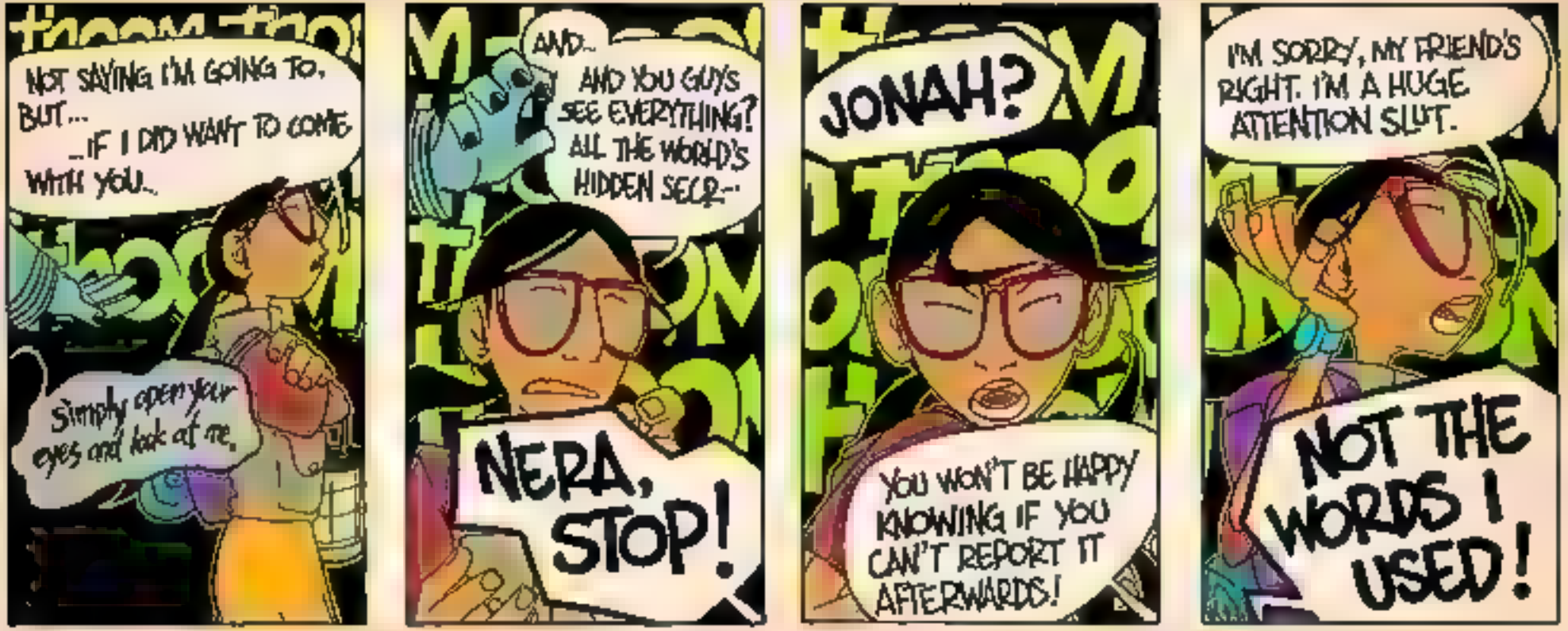

JONAH NEEDS SOME SCHOOLING AND THE WAIAKEA RESERVE IS MY CLASSROOM.
I BET I FIND THREE CRYPTID SPECIES UP THERE WHILE JONAH FARTS AROUND WITH HIS ROCK.
CAN I GET AN "AHEM" BASSY PHONE VOICE?
ohdarling.mp3
thatdress_01.mp3
hatoutfit.mp3
kitgirl.mp3
girl.mp3
onderful.mp3
You go girl!
I NEED A BETTER SUPPORTIVE GIRLFRIEND PEEPS.
You're a wonderful person and don't you forget it!


thoom thoom th
NOTE TO SELF: HIKING AT NIGHT IN THE JUNGLE NO LONGER RECOMMENDED.
om thoom th
ADDENDUM: ESPECIALLY DO NOT PICK JUNGLES WITH GHOSTLY LIGHTS AND DRUMMING.
OOM thoom
I'M INTRIGUED, BUT I KINDA WISH I WEREN'T ALONE.
thoom thc
wish granted.
WISH RETRACTED! WISH RETRACTED!

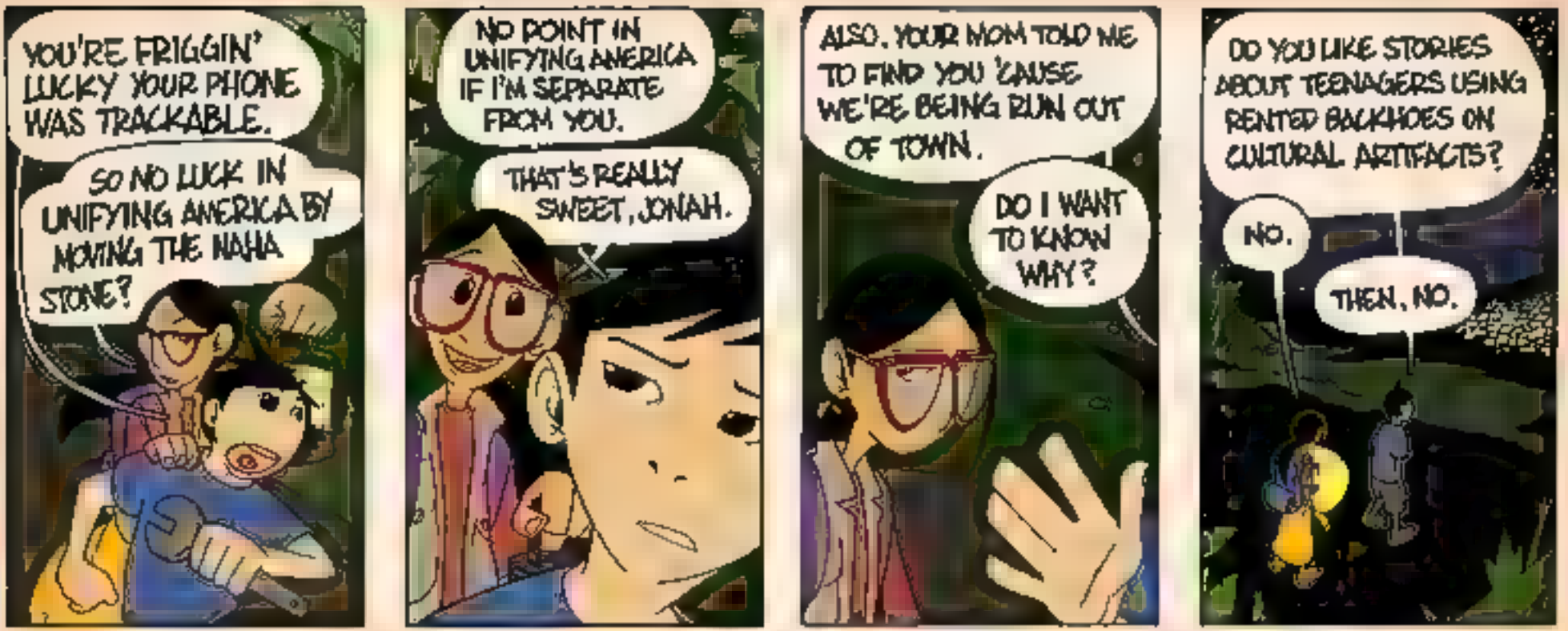

they are nightmarchers. the souls of fallen warriors from across time.
close your eyes or they'll take you before we can talk.
WHO...
WHO ARE YOU?
seaman first class, john hodge, u.s.s. arizona.
HEH. BAD AT HISTORY
I THOUGHT THE ARIZONA WAS BLOWN UP AT PEARL HARBOR.
actually, you're really good at history.

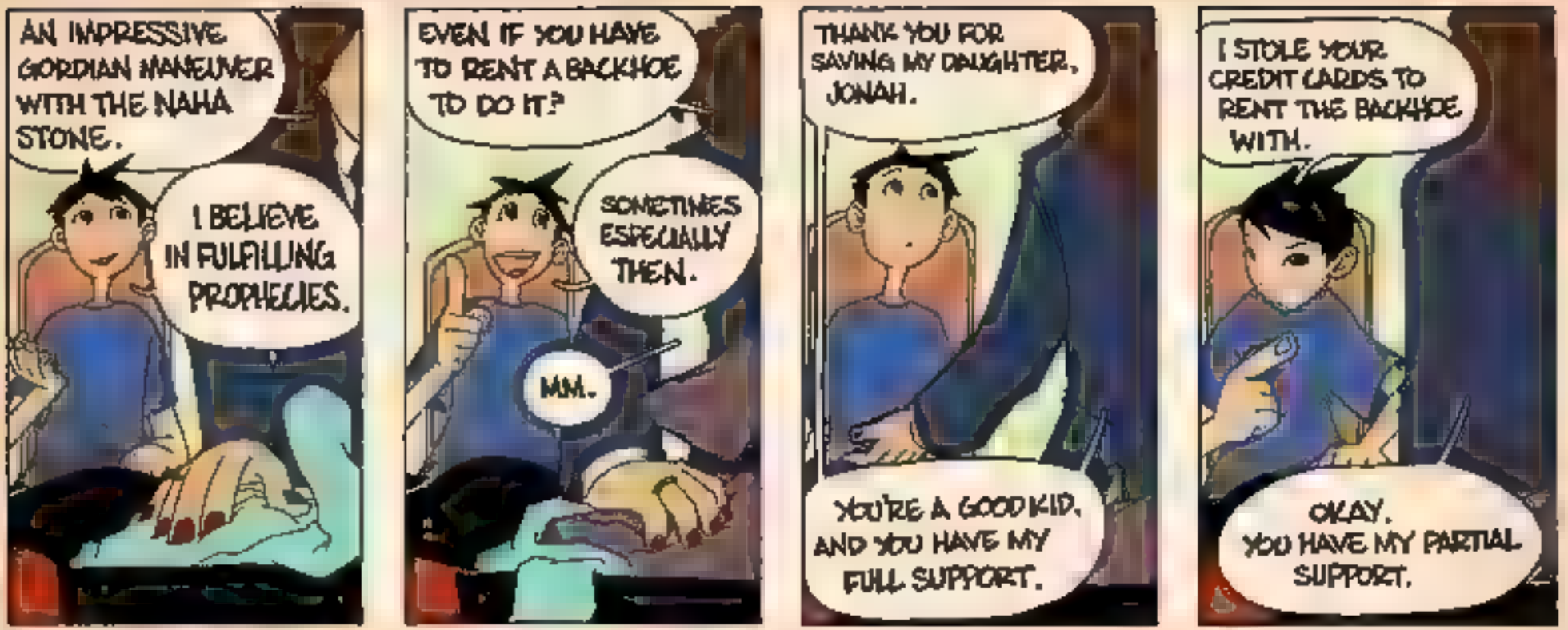


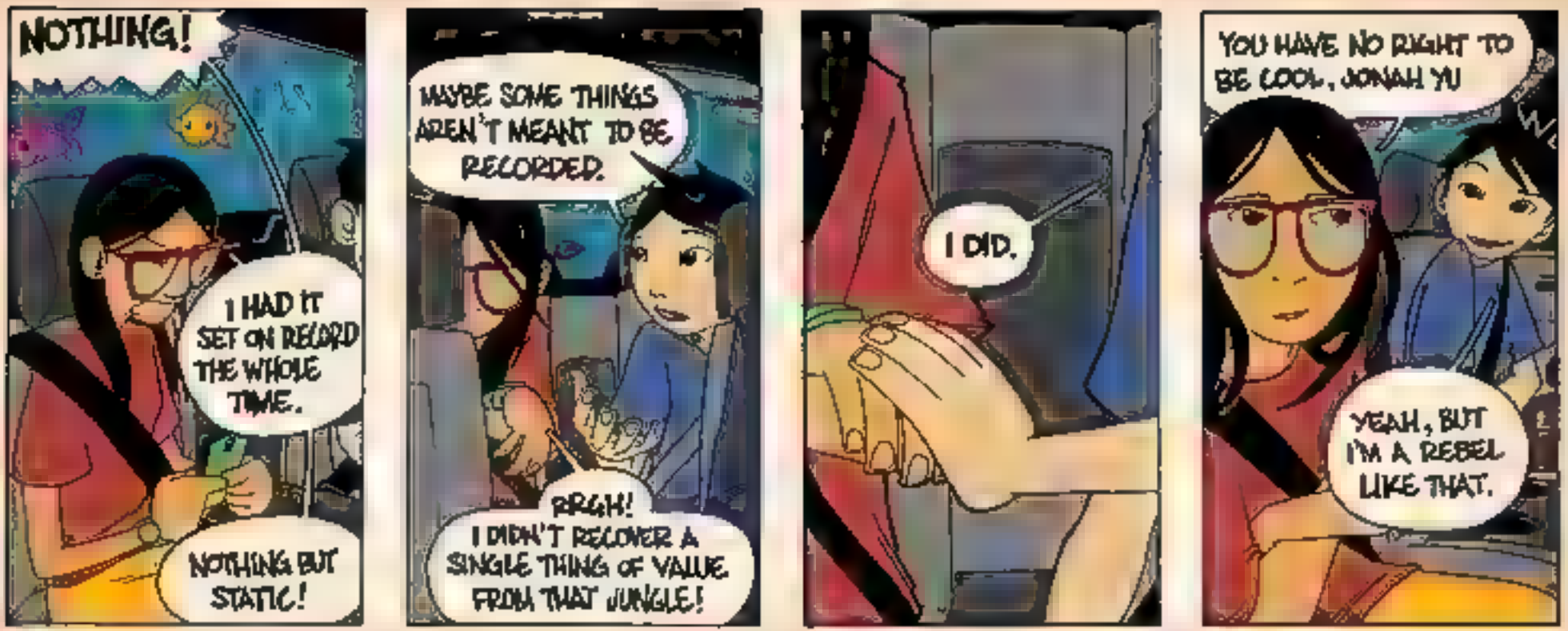

WHY ARE YOU TALKING TO ME? I'M NOT SOME SORT OF... GHOST SHRINK.
WAS A TIME I COULD'VE USED ONE OF THOSE. NOT ANYMORE.
I WANT YOU TO COME WITH US. YOU'D LIKE US.
W-WITH YOU?
WHY?
WE SEE EVERYTHING. NO TRUTH IS BEYOND US.
OK: TAOS HUM.
WOW! SIGNAL.
THE PREMISE OF VALVE'S F-STOP.
WORMHOLE.
REFLECTION OFF SPACE DEBRIS.
JOIN US! SEE.
DAMNIT!


NOT SAYING I'M GOING TO, BUT...
...IF I DID WANT TO COME WITH YOU...
Simply open your eyes and look at me.
AND...
AND YOU GUYS SEE EVERYTHING? ALL THE WORLD'S HIDDEN SELF--
NERA, STOP!
JONAH?
YOU WON'T BE HAPPY KNOWING IF YOU CAN'T REPORT IT AFTERWARDS!
I'M SORRY, MY FRIEND'S RIGHT. I'M A HUGE ATTENTION SLUT.
NOT THE WORDS I USED!

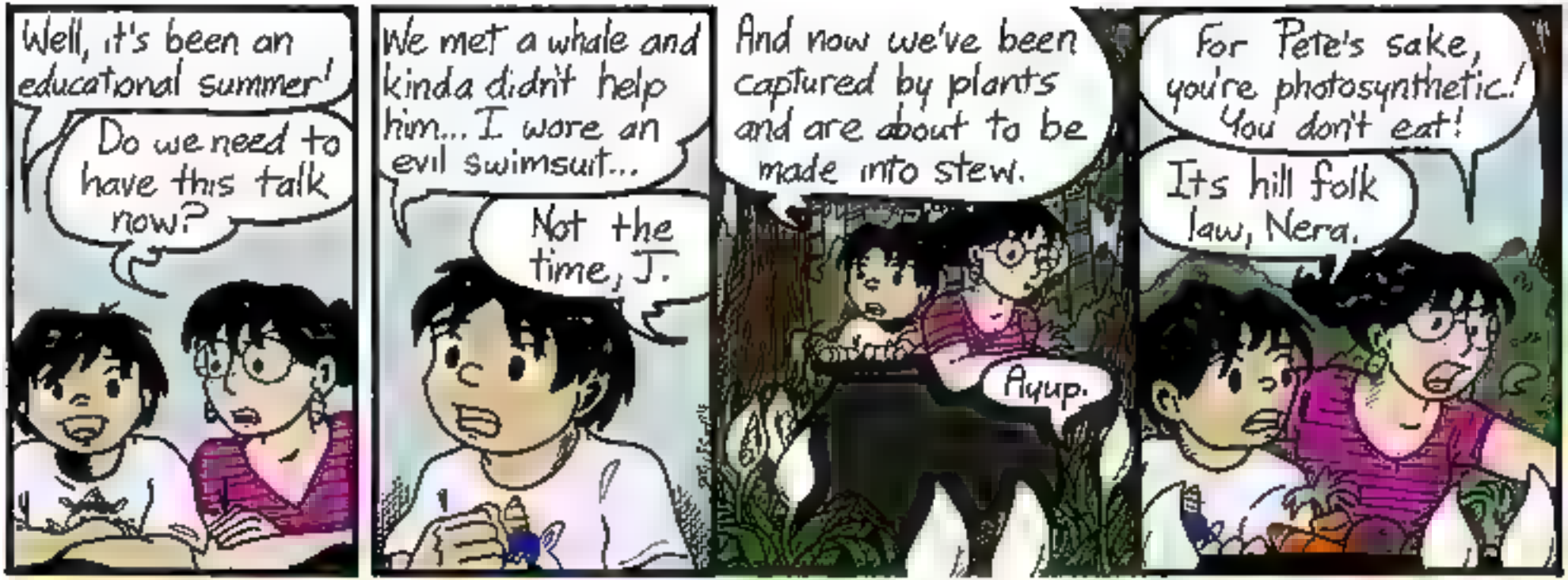

You're screwing up a chance of a lifetime for your friend.
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT "LIFE," YOU ECTOPLASMIC TURD!?
THOOM
JONAH, BE CAREFUL! DON'T LOOK AT HIM!
WAY AHEAD OF YA.
THANKS TO MY MENTAL POWERS, I FUNCTION JUST LIKE NORMAL WITH MY EYES CLOSED.
THUD
THAT SAID, I DO HAVE A PRETTY INCOMPETENT "NORMAL."
IT'S JUST OUR SOULS!
NO PRESSURE OR ANYTHING!


YOU'RE FRIGGIN' LUCKY YOUR PHONE WAS TRACKABLE.
SO NO LUCK IN UNIFYING AMERICA BY MOVING THE NAHA STONE?
NO POINT IN UNIFYING AMERICA IF I'M SEPARATE FROM YOU.
THAT'S REALLY SWEET, JONAH.
ALSO. YOUR MOM TOLD ME TO FIND YOU 'CAUSE WE'RE BEING RUN OUT OF TOWN.
DO I WANT TO KNOW WHY?
DO YOU LIKE STORIES ABOUT TEENAGERS USING RENTED BACKHOES ON CULTURAL ARTIFACTS?
NO.
THEN, NO.

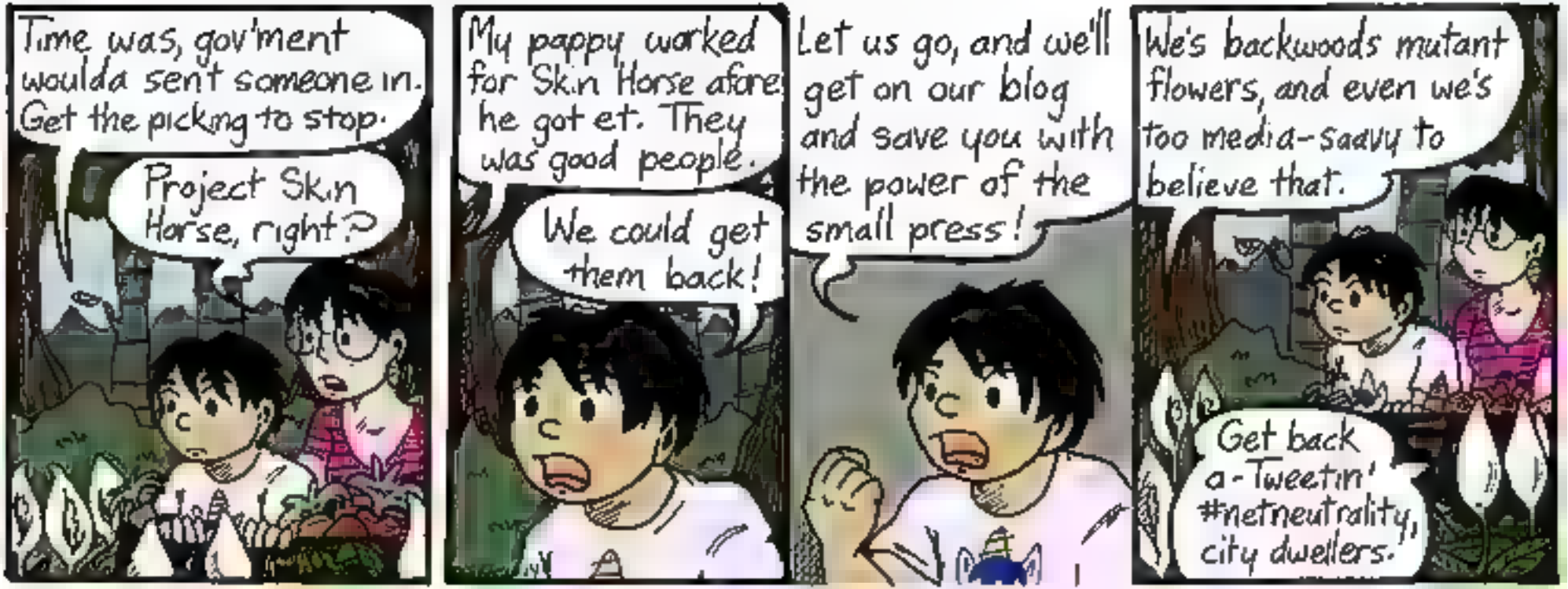

AN IMPRESSIVE GORDIAN MANEUVER WITH THE NAHA STONE.
I BELIEVE IN FULFILLING PROPHECIES.
EVEN IF YOU HAVE TO RENT A BACKHOE TO DO IT?
SOMETIMES ESPECIALLY THEN.
MM.
THANK YOU FOR SAVING MY DAUGHTER, JONAH.
YOU'RE A GOOD KID, AND YOU HAVE MY FULL SUPPORT.
I STOLE YOUR CREDIT CARDS TO RENT THE BACKHOE WITH.
OKAY. YOU HAVE MY PARTIAL SUPPORT.


NOTHING!
I HAD IT SET ON RECORD THE WHOLE TIME.
NOTHING BUT STATIC!
MAYBE SOME THINGS AREN'T MEANT TO BE RECORDED.
ARGH! I DIDN'T RECOVER A SINGLE THING OF VALUE FROM THAT JUNGLE!
I DID.
YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO BE COOL, JONAH YU
YEAH, BUT I'M A REBEL LIKE THAT.


Hi
Thank you!

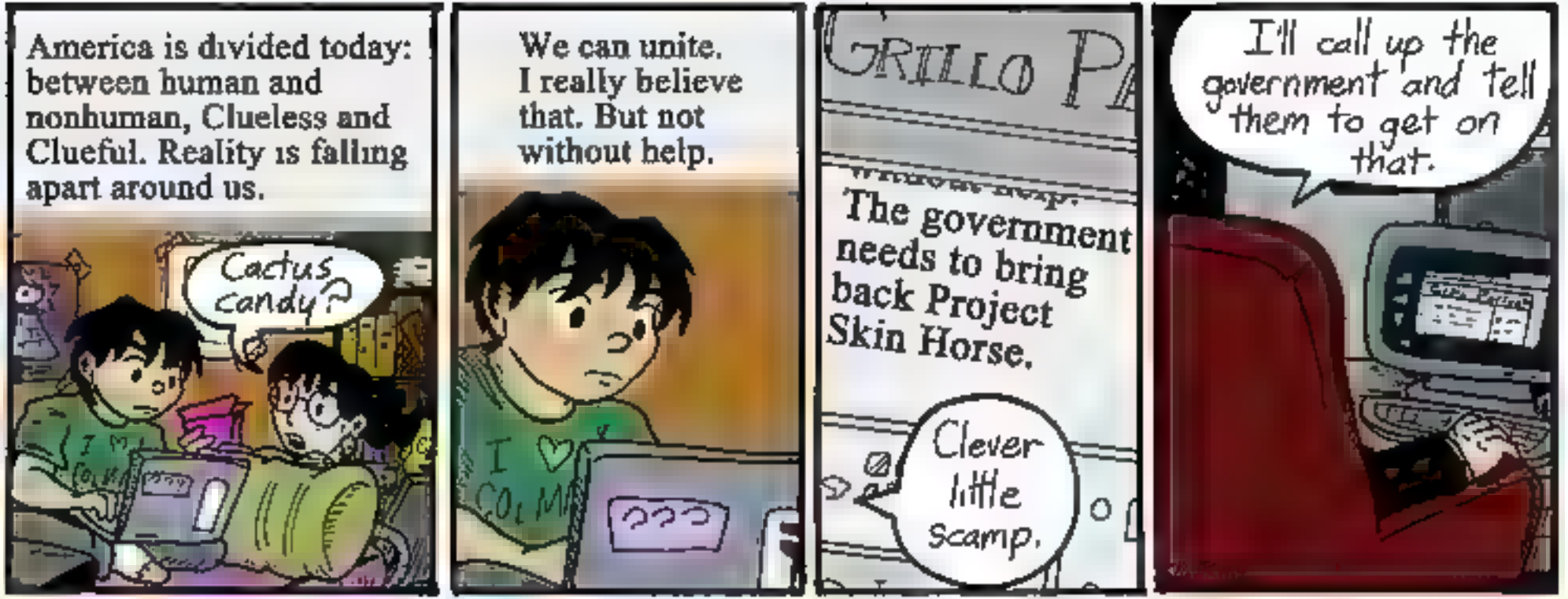

Well, it's been an educational summer!
Do we need to have this talk now?
We met a whale and kinda didn't help him... I wore an evil swimsuit...
Not the time, J.
And now we've been captured by plants and are about to be made into stew.
Ayup.
For Pete's sake, you're photosynthetic! You don't eat!
Its hill folk law, Nera.


This ain't eatin' stew. This here's revenge stew.
Walkin' folk come in our woods and pick us.
Gosh, can we help?
No.
No!
Enough talk. We got to chop up our kinfolk here.
You're chopping vegetables, you know?
Don't judge us! The family tree gets right complex on Uncle Levi's side!
Wow, yeah, the pollination issues alone...

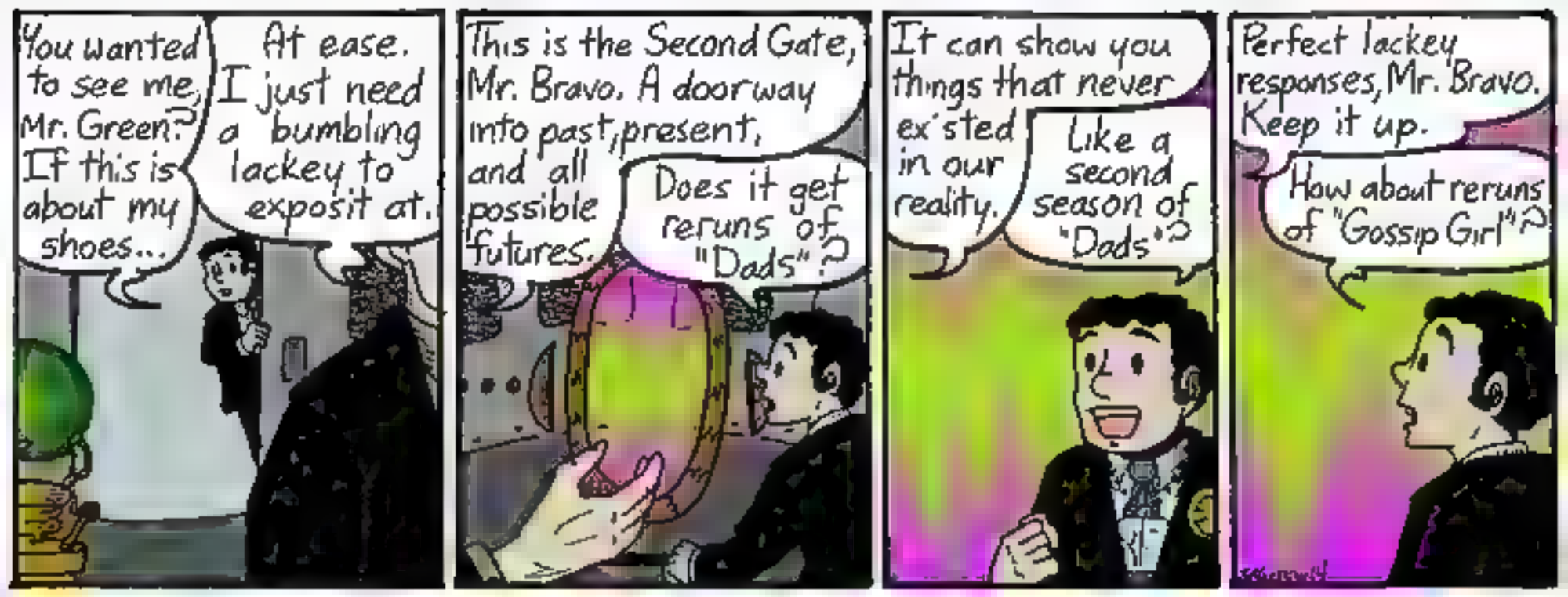

Time was, gov'ment woulda sent someone in. Get the picking to stop.
Project Skin Horse, right?
My pappy worked for Skin Horse afore he got et. They was good people.
We could get them back!
Let us go, and we'll get on our blog and save you with the power of the small press!
We's backwoods mutant flowers, and even we's too media-saavy to believe that.
Get back a-Tweetin' #netneutrality, city dwellers.


Sorry, but bloggers ain't good fer naught but stew.
You know what we're good for? Rocking the boat!
On three ..
THREE!
SPLOOSH
Quick! After them!
Uh, how?
It's a dang shame how often we's reduced to gun violence.
KKKK
"Rocking the boat." I see what they did.

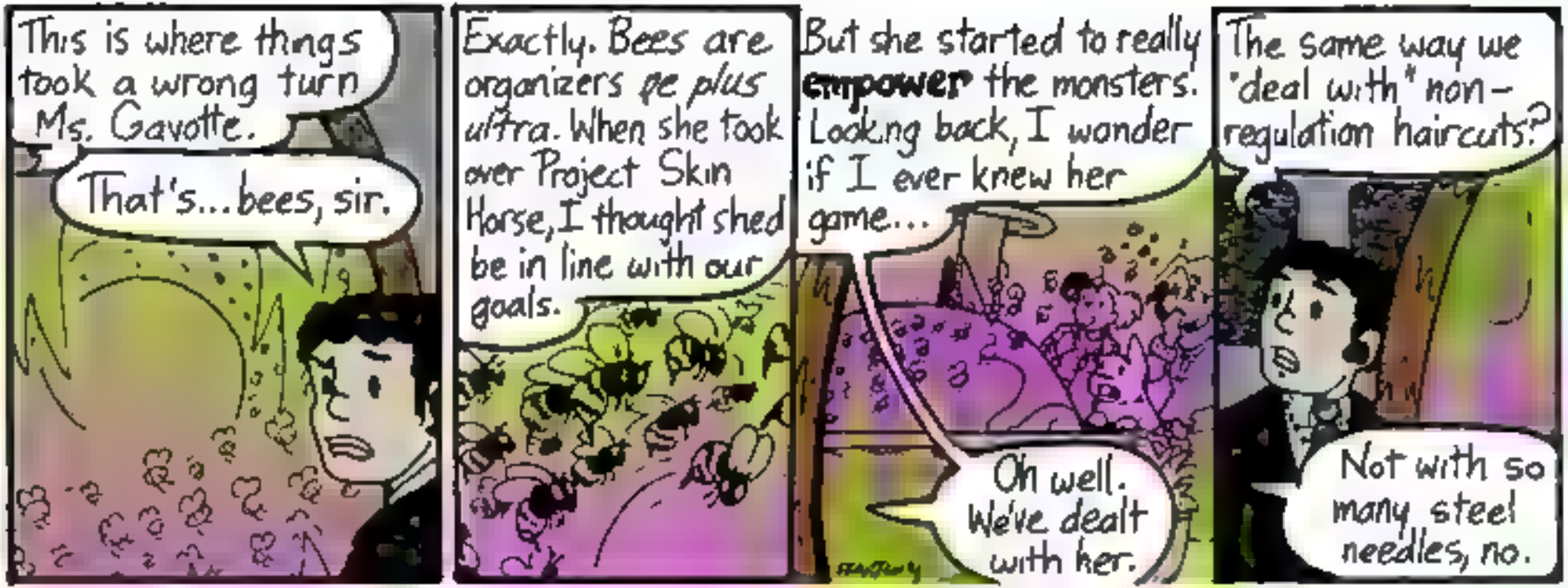

I can't help but see this as karmic justice!
For what?
BLAM
BLAM
We could've done more to help all the people we met on this trip.
We'll help them. We'll bring back Skin Horse.
By doing what we do best: writing.
PTANG
Turns out we're also good at dodging bullets.
Yeah, check out my serpentine evasion!

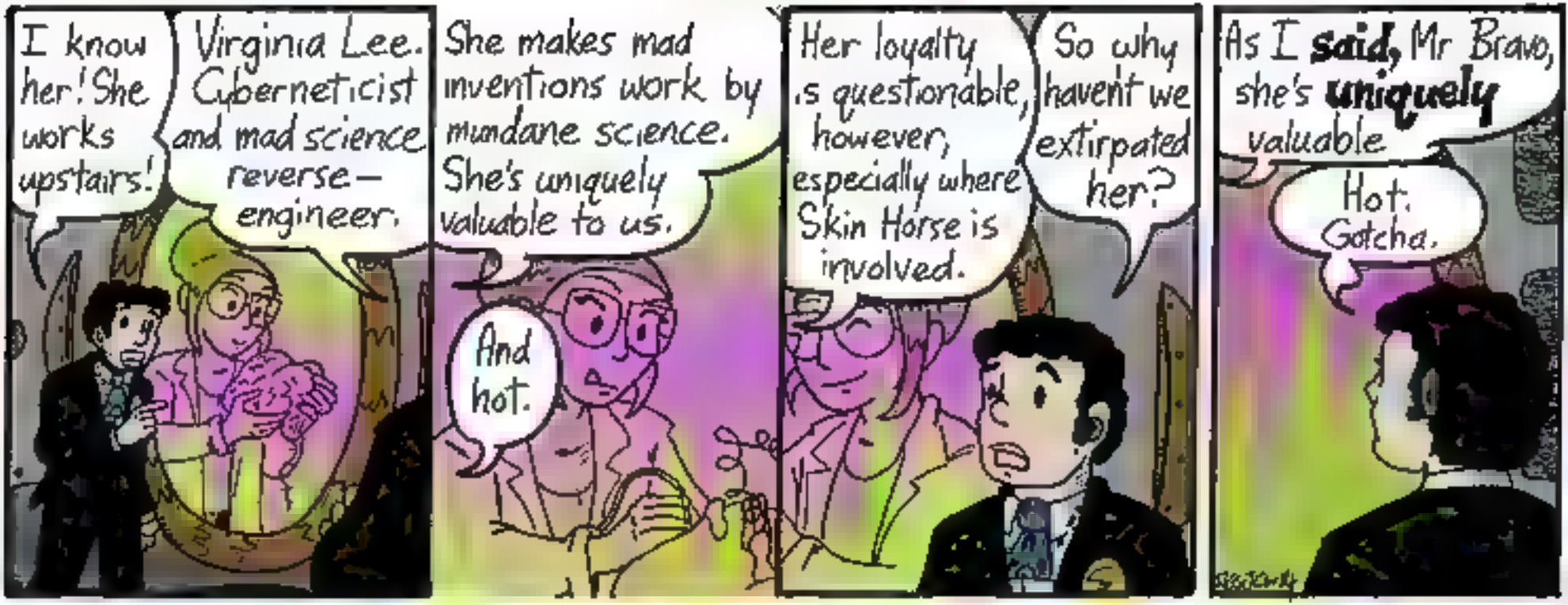

America is divided today: between human and nonhuman, Clueless and Clueful. Reality is falling apart around us.
Cactus candy?
We can unite. I really believe that. But not without help.
The government needs to bring back Project Skin Horse.
Clever little scamp.
I'll call up the government and tell them to get on that.

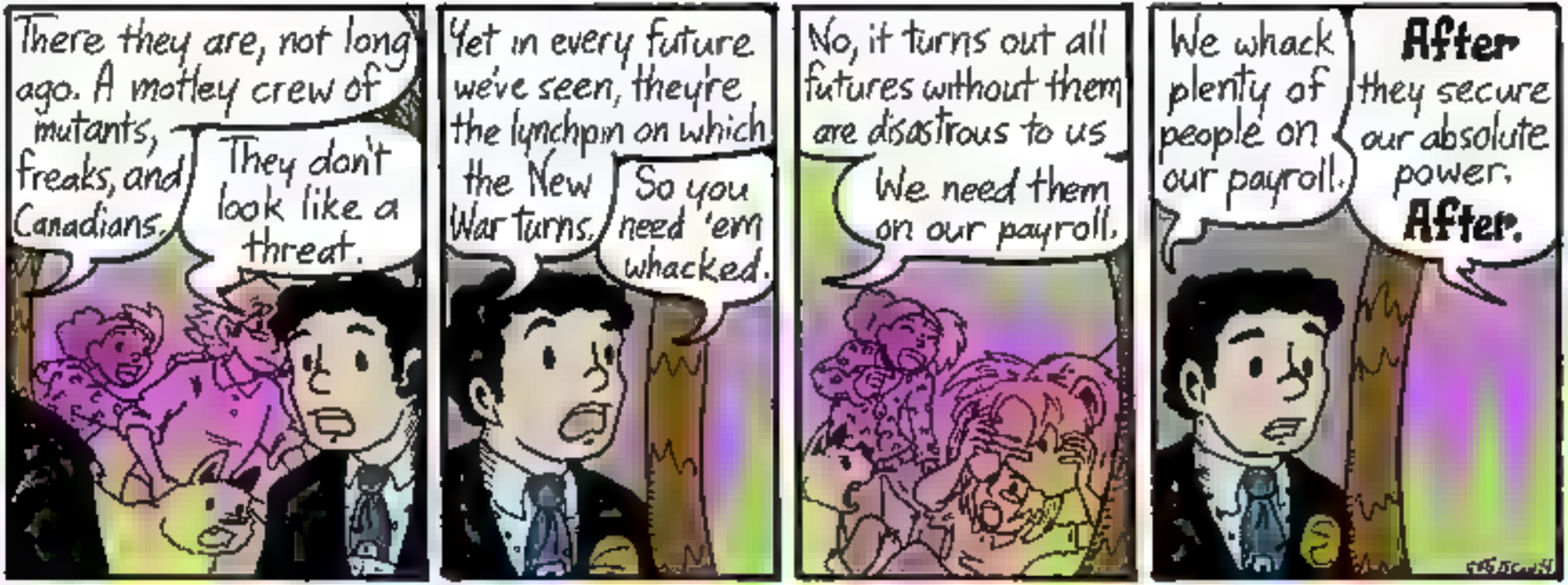


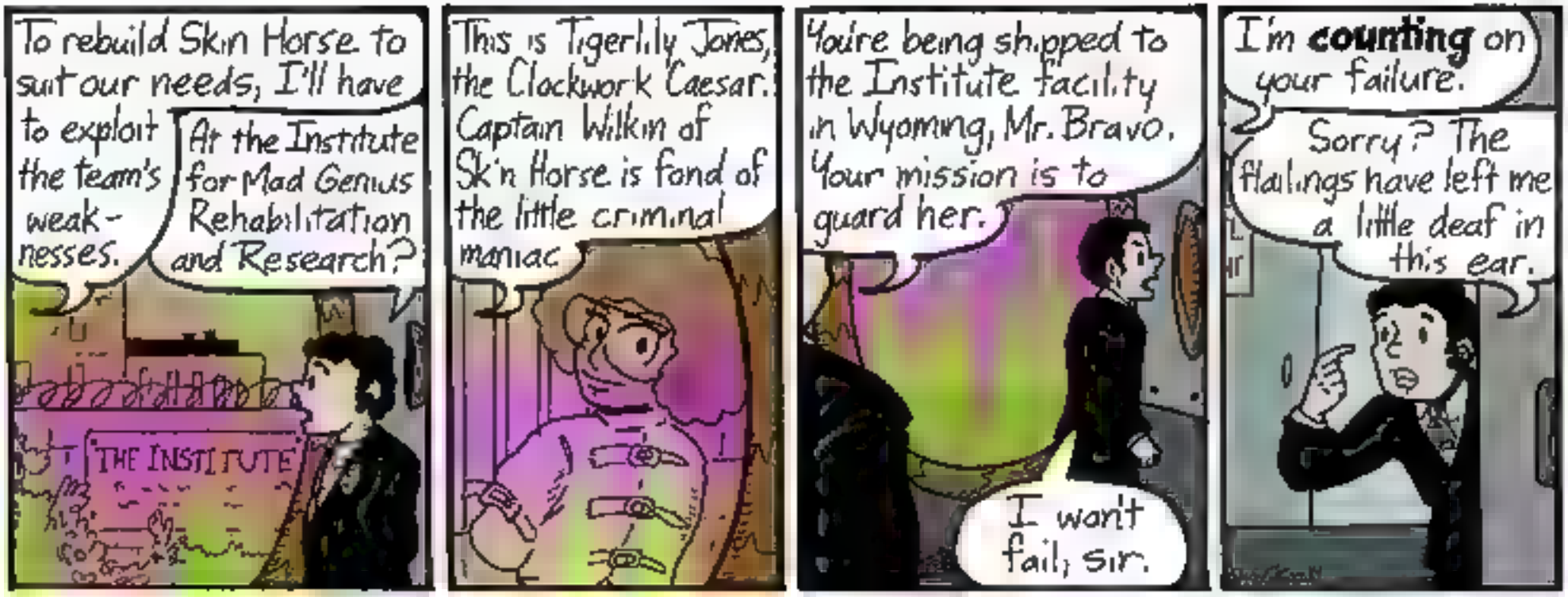

You wanted to see me, Mr. Green? If this is about my shoes...
At ease. I just need a bumbling lackey to exposit at.
This is the Second Gate, Mr. Bravo. A doorway into past, present, and all possible futures.
Does it get reruns of "Dads"?
It can show you things that never ex'sted in our reality.
Like a second season of "Dads"?
Perfect lackey responses, Mr. Bravo. Keep it up.
How about reruns of "Gossip Girl"?

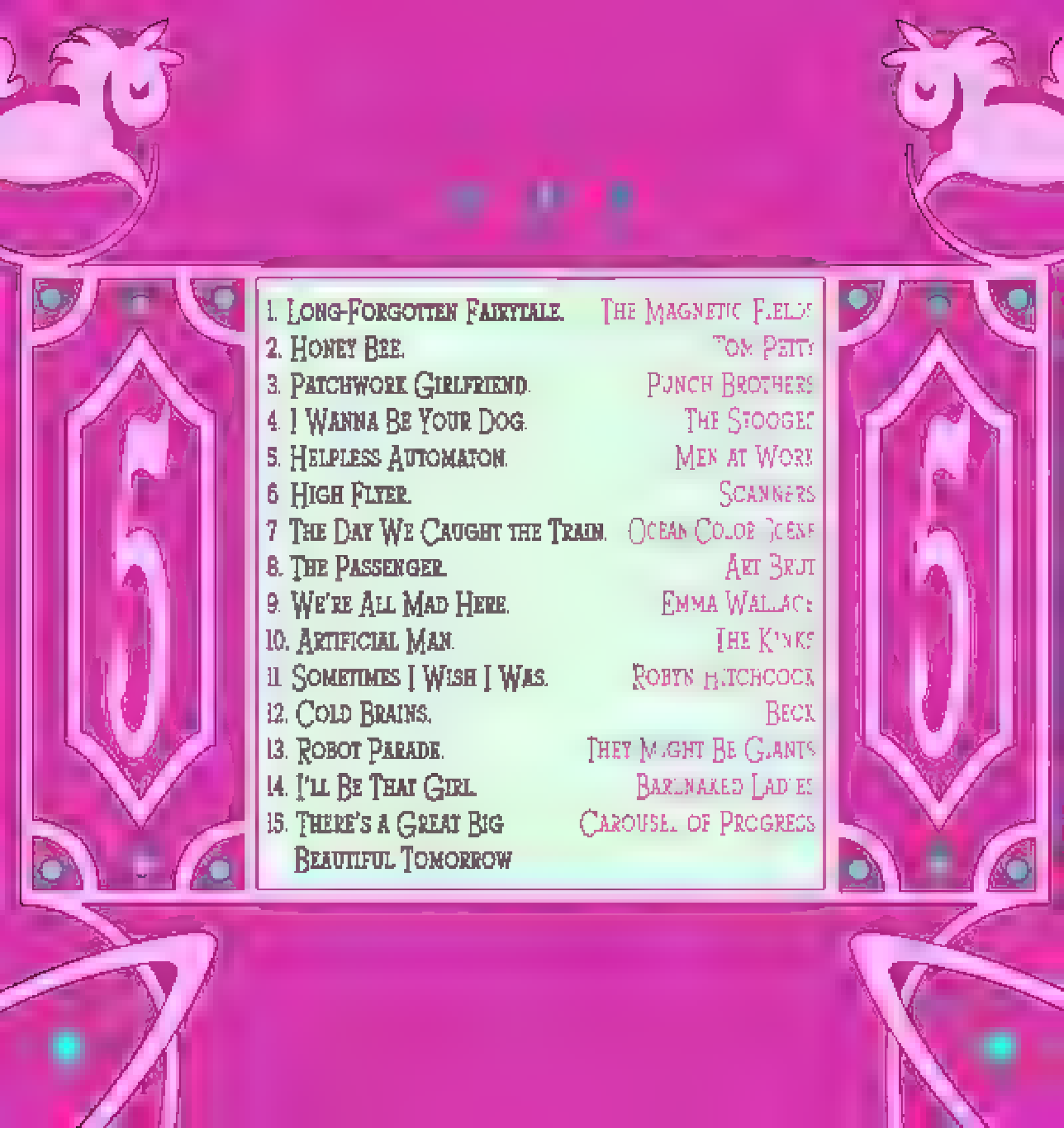

This, in our universe, is Project Skin Horse. A welfare agency on the lowest rung of the shadow-gov ladder.
REDACTED
I set it up, and it was useful for a while. Now... disbanded.
How come, sir?
They turned from petty bureaucrats to social justice warriors.
Fired just for doing their job.
Also for wrecking buildings and occasional baby-eating, but no more so than average.
I always thought we had too many babies anyway.


This is where things took a wrong turn Ms. Gavotte.
That's...bees, sir.
Exactly. Bees are organizers *de plus ultra*. When she took over Project Skin Horse, I thought shed be in line with our goals.
But she started to really **empower** the monsters. Looking back, I wonder if I ever knew her game...
Oh well. We've dealt with her.
The same way we "deal with" non-regulation haircuts?
Not with so many steel needles, no.

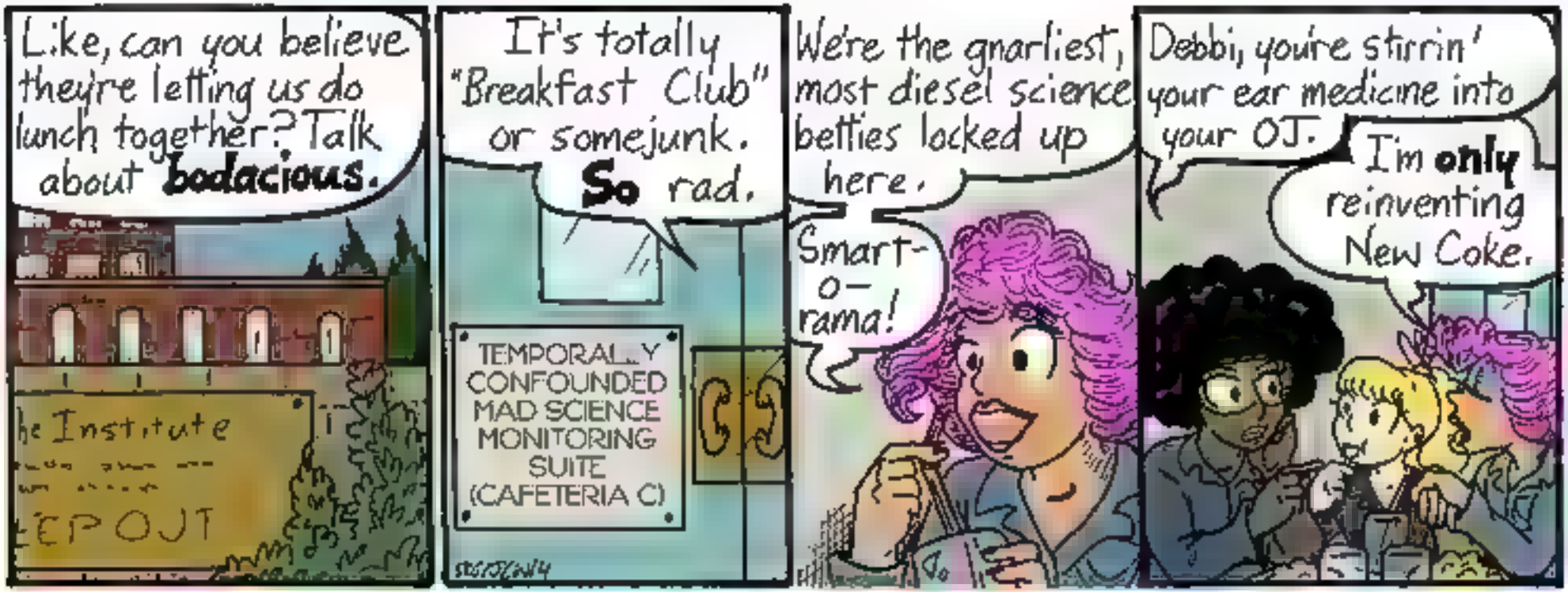

I know her! She works upstairs!
Virginia Lee. Cyberneticist and mad science reverse-engineer.
She makes mad inventions work by mundane science. She's uniquely valuable to us.
And hot.
Her loyalty is questionable, however, especially where Skin Horse is involved.
So why haven't we extirpated her?
As I said, Mr Bravo, she's uniquely valuable
Hot. Gotcha.

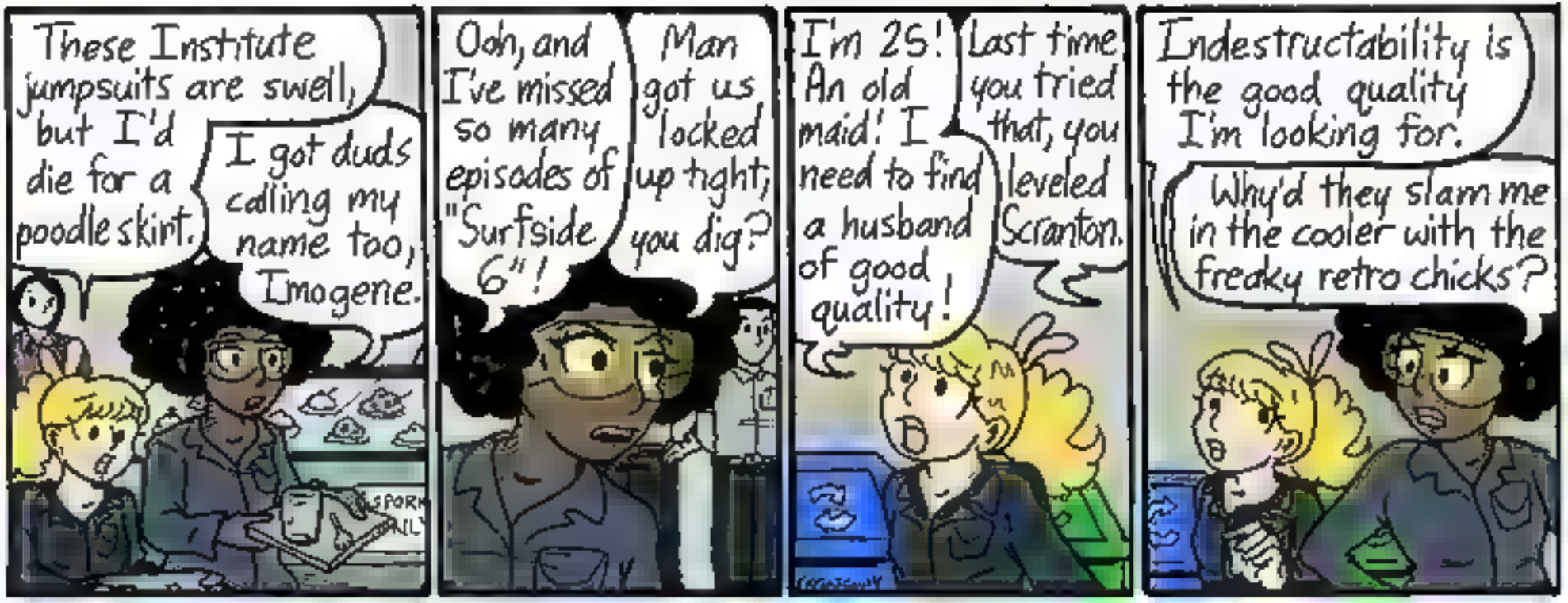

There they are, not long ago. A motley crew of mutants, freaks, and Canadians.
They don't look like a threat.
Yet in every future we've seen, they're the lynchpin on which the New War turns.
So you need 'em whacked.
No, it turns out all futures without them are disastrous to us
We need them on our payroll.
We whack plenty of people on our payroll.
After they secure our absolute power.
After.


To rebuild Skin Horse to suit our needs, I'll have to exploit the team's weaknesses.
At the Institute for Mad Genius Rehabilitation and Research?
THE INSTITUTE
This is Tigerlily Jones, the Clockwork Caesar. Captain Wilkin of Sk'n Horse is fond of the little criminal maniac
You're being shipped to the Institute facility in Wyoming, Mr. Bravo. Your mission is to guard her.
I won't fail, sir.
I'm **counting** on your failure.
Sorry? The flailings have left me a little deaf in this ear.

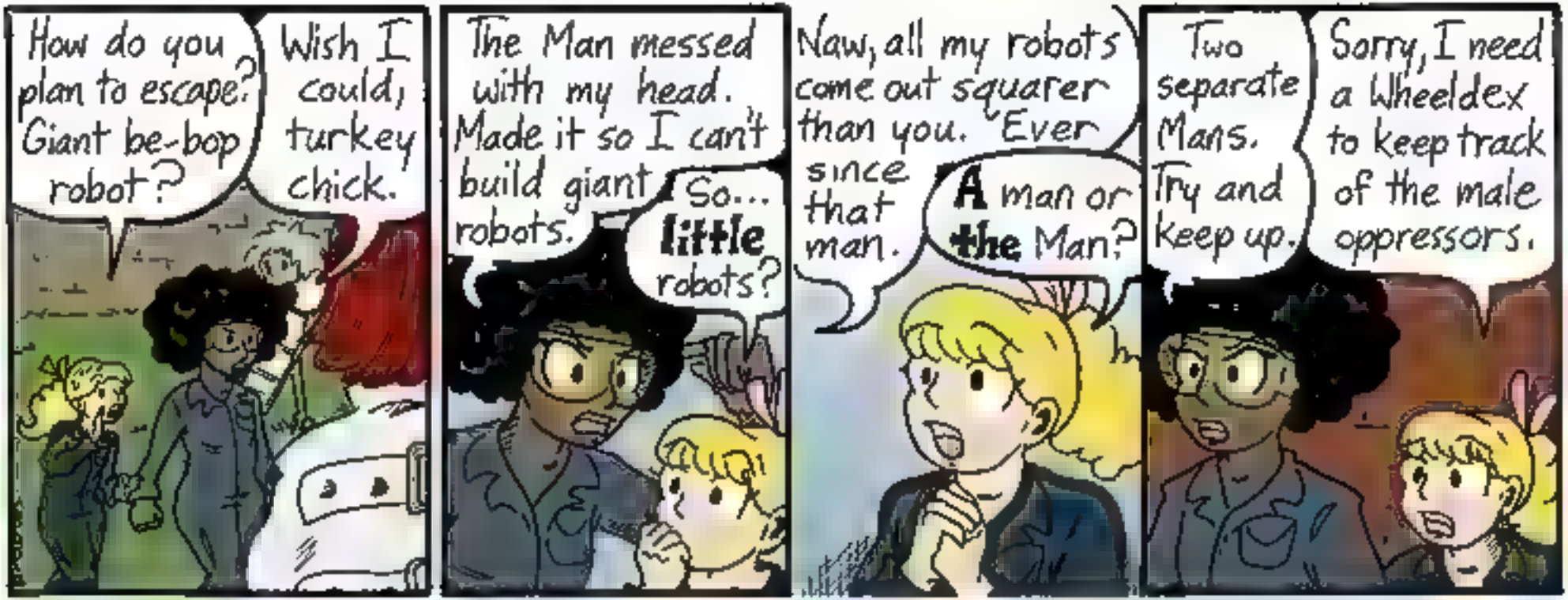


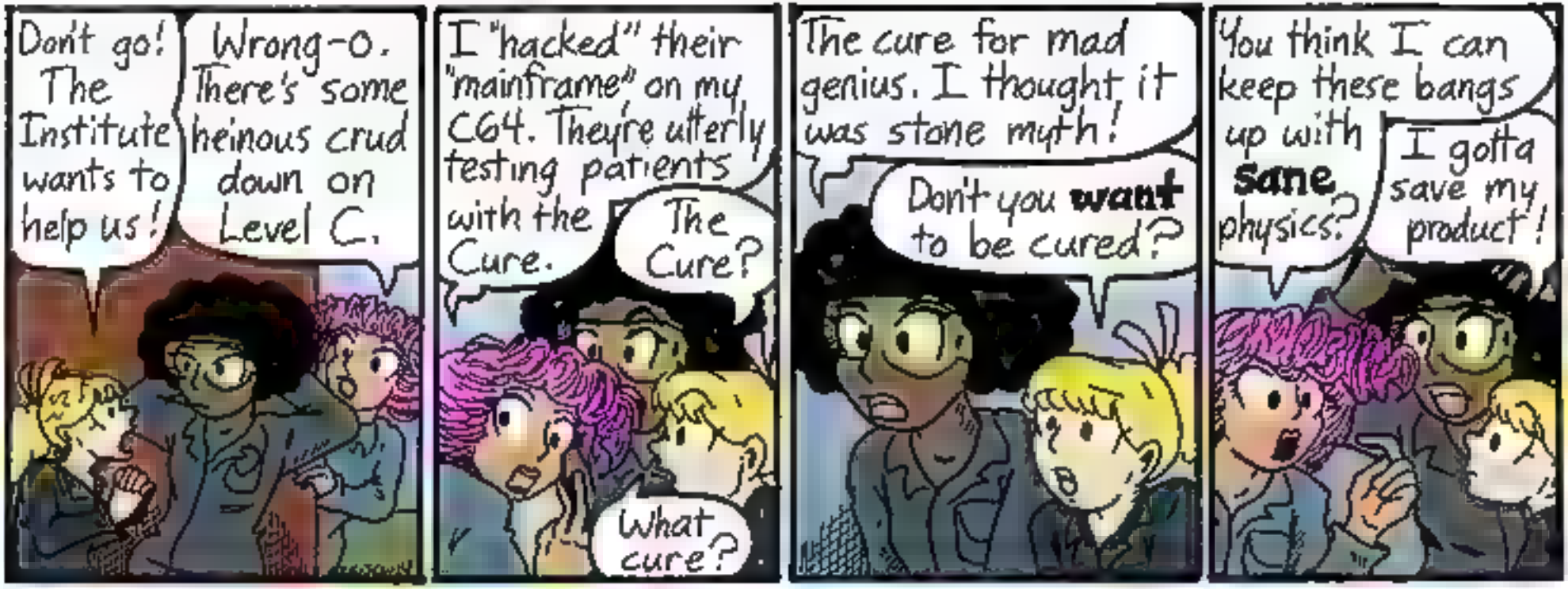
1. Long-Forgotten Fairytale.	The Magnetic Fields
2. Honey Bee.	Tom Petty
3. Patchwork Girlfriend.	Punch Brothers
4. I Wanna Be Your Dog.	The Stooges
5. Helpless Automaton.	Men at Work
6 High Flyer.	Scanners
7 The Day We Caught the Train.	Ocean Color Scene
8. The Passenger.	Art Brut
9. We're All Mad Here.	Emma Wallace
10. Artificial Man.	The Kinks
11 Sometimes I Wish I Was.	Robyn Hitchcock
12. Cold Brains.	Beck
13. Robot Parade.	They Might Be Giants
14. I'll Be That Girl.	Barenaked Ladies
15. There's a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow	Carousel of Progress

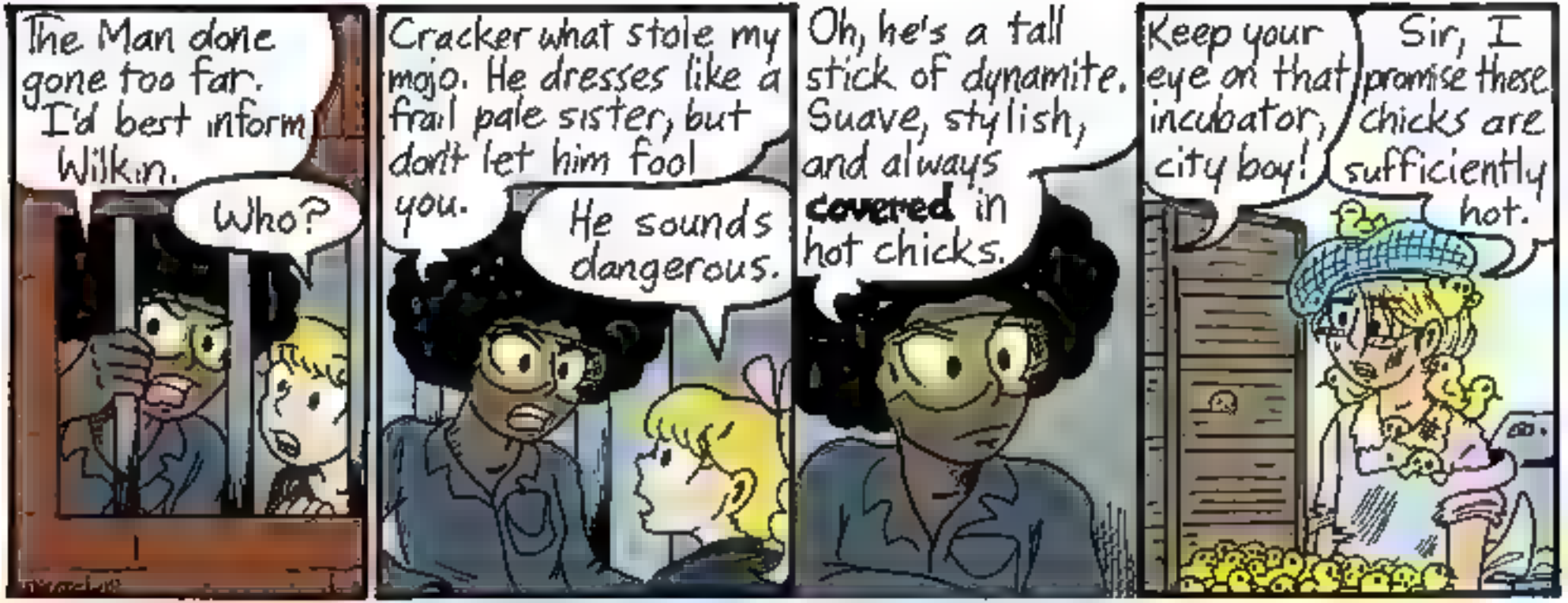

Like, can you believe they're letting us do lunch together? Talk about bodacious.
he Institute
EPOJT
It's totally "Breakfast Club" or somejunk. So rad.
TEMPORALLY CONFOUNDED MAD SCIENCE MONITORING SUITE (CAFETERIA C)
We're the gnarliest, most diesel science betties locked up here.
Smart-o-rama!
Debbi, you're stirrin' your ear medicine into your OJ.
I'm only reinventing New Coke.


These Institute jumpsuits are swell, but I'd die for a poodle skirt.
I got duds calling my name too, Imogene.
SPORK
Ooh, and I've missed so many episodes of "Surfside 6"!
Man got us locked up tight, you dig?
I'm 25! An old maid! I need to find a husband of good quality!
Last time you tried that, you leveled Scranton.
Indestructability is the good quality I'm looking for.
Why'd they slam me in the cooler with the freaky retro chicks?

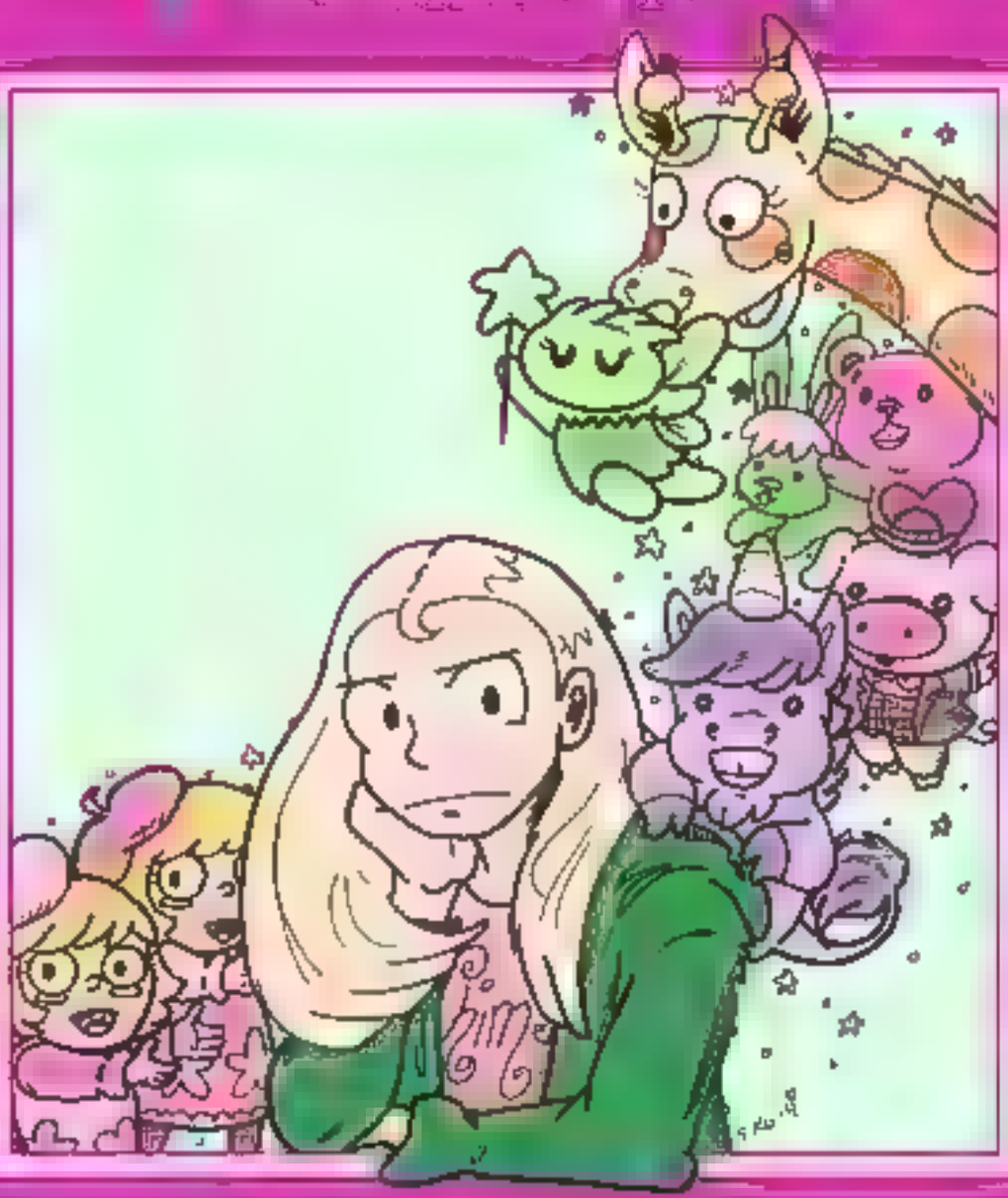

I got plans to jackrabbit parole myself outta here. You come with before this joint cracks you.
Oh no, Miss Jones!
People like us do better in the Institute!
Prudence Fairweather over there thought the same.
Next time rustlers come fer my oxen, they'll face my Conestoga of Death!
Fair point.
I mean, look at that jive hat.
Dysentery's too good fer their lot!

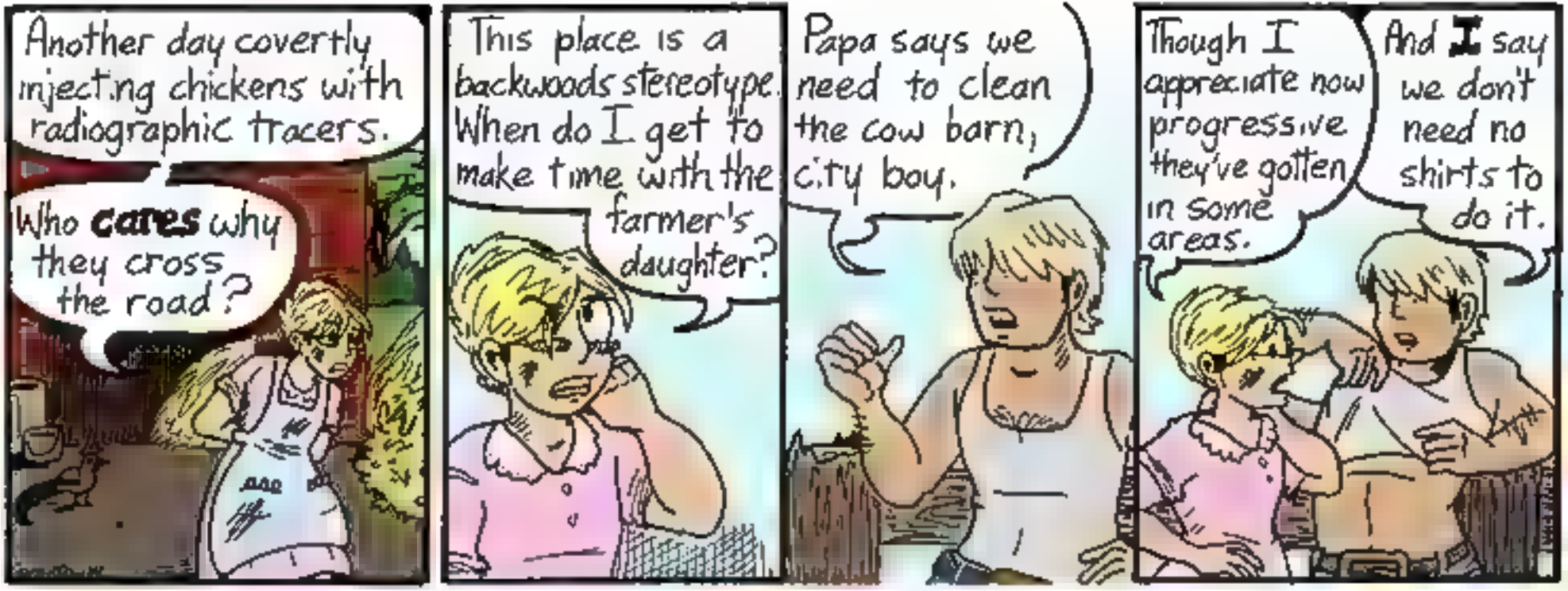

How do you plan to escape? Giant be-bop robot?
Wish I could, turkey chick.
The Man messed with my head. Made it so I can't build giant robots.
So... little robots?
Naw, all my robots come out squarer than you. Ever since that man.
A man or the Man?
Two separate Mans. Try and keep up.
Sorry, I need a Wheeldex to keep track of the male oppressors.

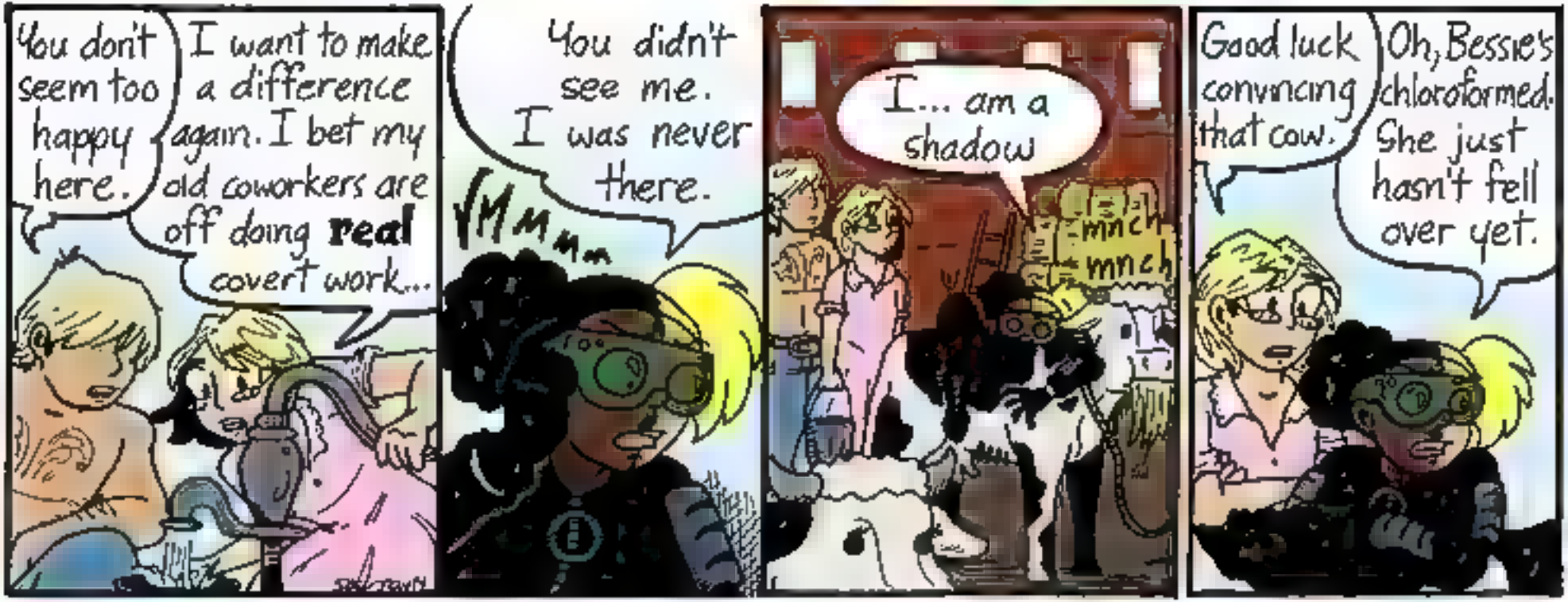

Don't go! The Institute wants to help us!
Wrong-o. There's some heinous crud down on Level C.
I "hacked" their "mainframe" on my C64. They're utterly testing patients with the Cure.
The Cure?
What cure?
The cure for mad genius. I thought it was stone myth!
Don't you **want** to be cured?
You think I can keep these bangs up with **sane** physics?
I gotta save my product!


The Man done gone too far. I'd best inform Wilkin.
Who?
Cracker what stole my mojo. He dresses like a frail pale sister, but don't let him fool you.
He sounds dangerous.
Oh, he's a tall stick of dynamite. Suave, stylish, and always covered in hot chicks.
Keep your eye on that incubator, city boy!
Sir, I promise these chicks are sufficiently hot.

Skin Horse

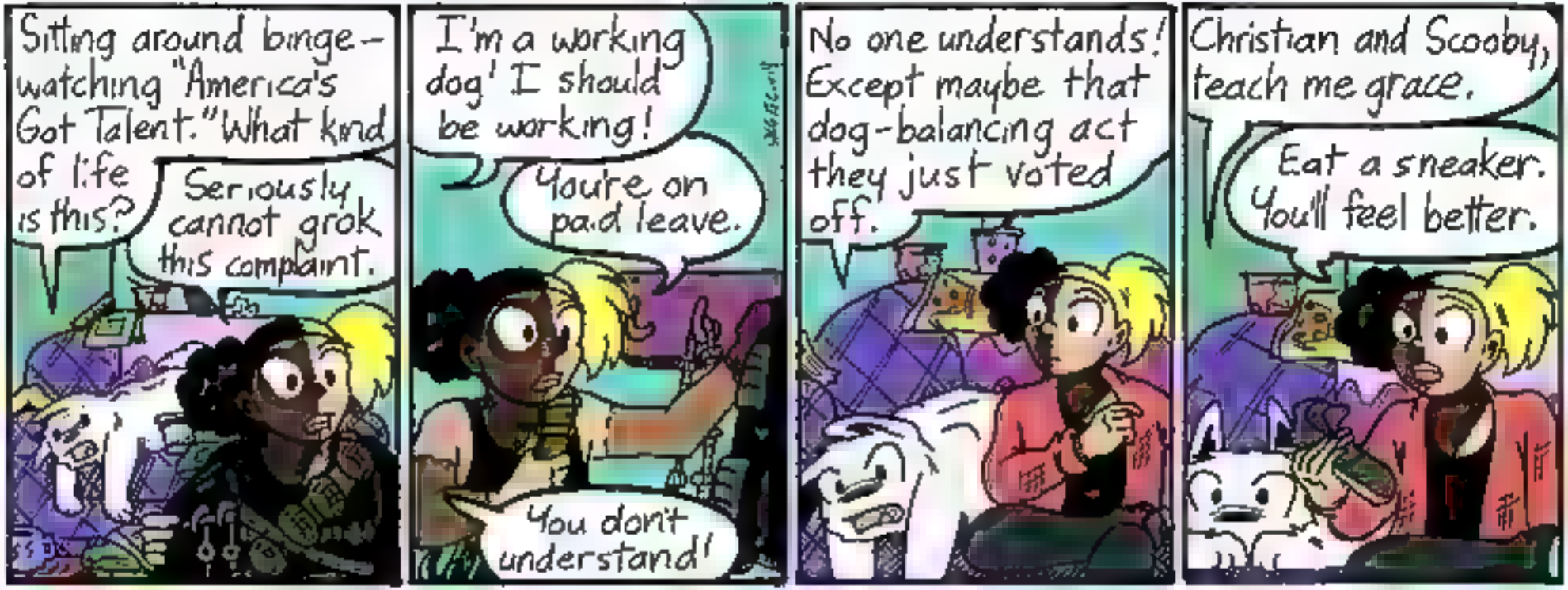



Another day covertly injecting chickens with radiographic tracers.
Who **cares** why they cross the road?
This place is a backwoods stereotype. When do I get to make time with the farmer's daughter?
Papa says we need to clean the cow barn, city boy.
Though I appreciate how progressive they've gotten in some areas.
And **I** say we don't need no shirts to do it.


You don't seem too happy here.
I want to make a difference again. I bet my old coworkers are off doing **real** covert work...
You didn't see me. I was never there.
Mmm
I... am a shadow
mnch mnch
Good luck convincing that cow.
Oh, Bessie's chloroformed. She just hasn't fell over yet.

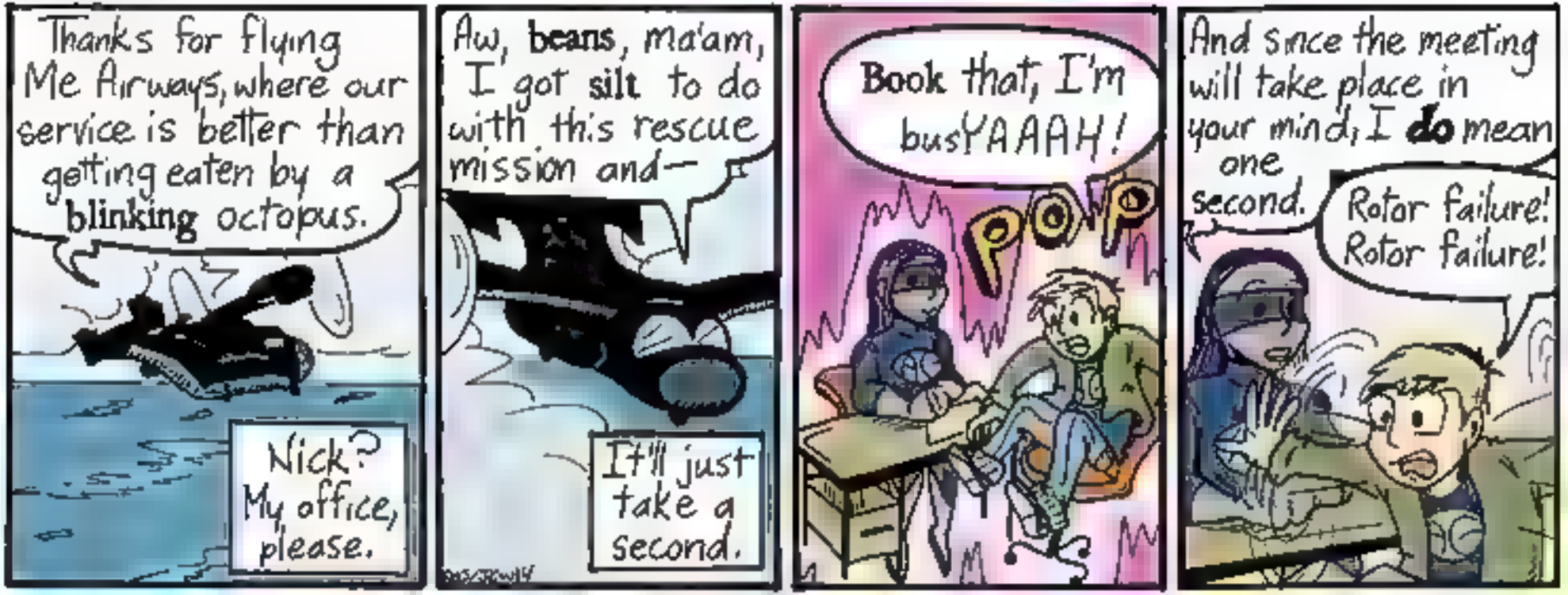

Unity! What are you doing here?
Working for the government cheese program.
Emergency Food Assistance? I thought they discontinued that.
Nah, it just went underground.
We sneak around milking cows, then break into people's fridges and plant the cheese we make.
That's... one of the best uses of tax dollars I've heard.
It's like "Inception" but I get to touch animal boob.

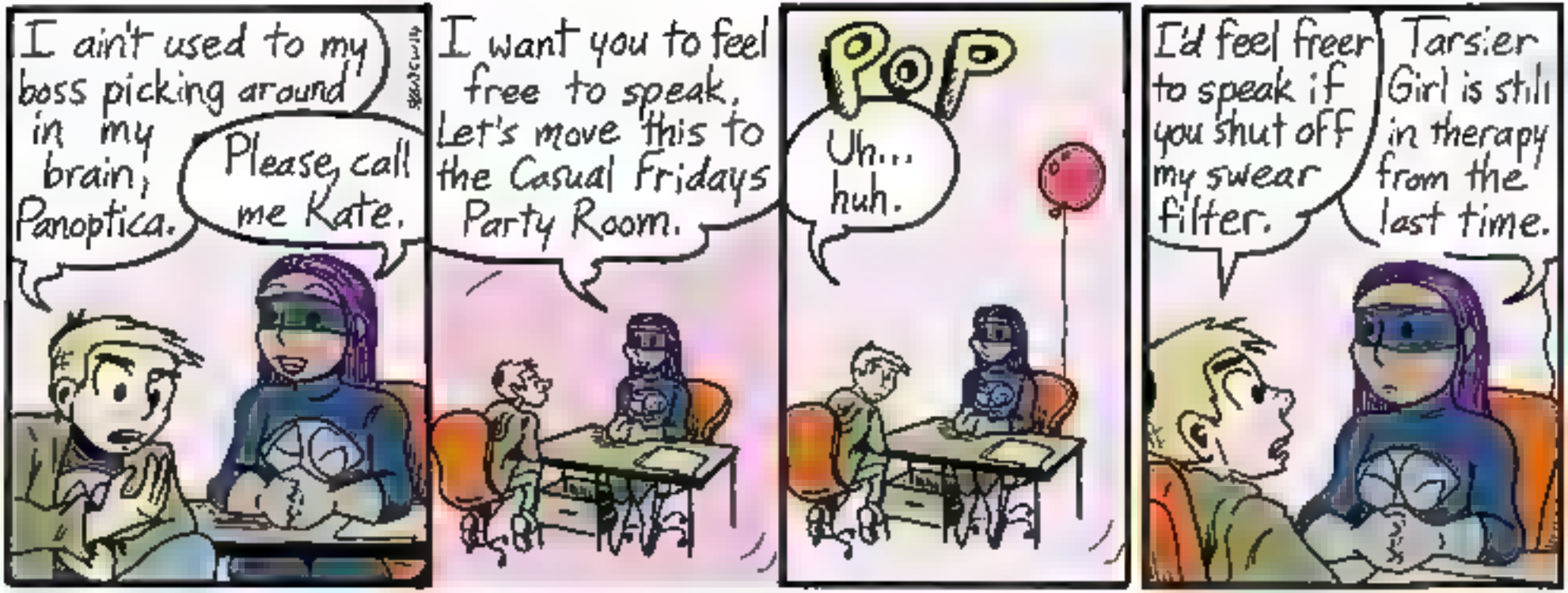

It's so good to see you working with livestock without eating it!
Yup, I am a totes mature professional except that one time.
You wanna grab a coffee... or milk or...
Sorry. Boss freaks if I don't get my shadow milk to the depository
After that I gotta rush home and help babe unwind.
Oh yeah. I'm sure Sweetheart's a whirlwind of energy.
Thank God you're back. My remote fell down.
Your fetch skills have gone to crap, babe.

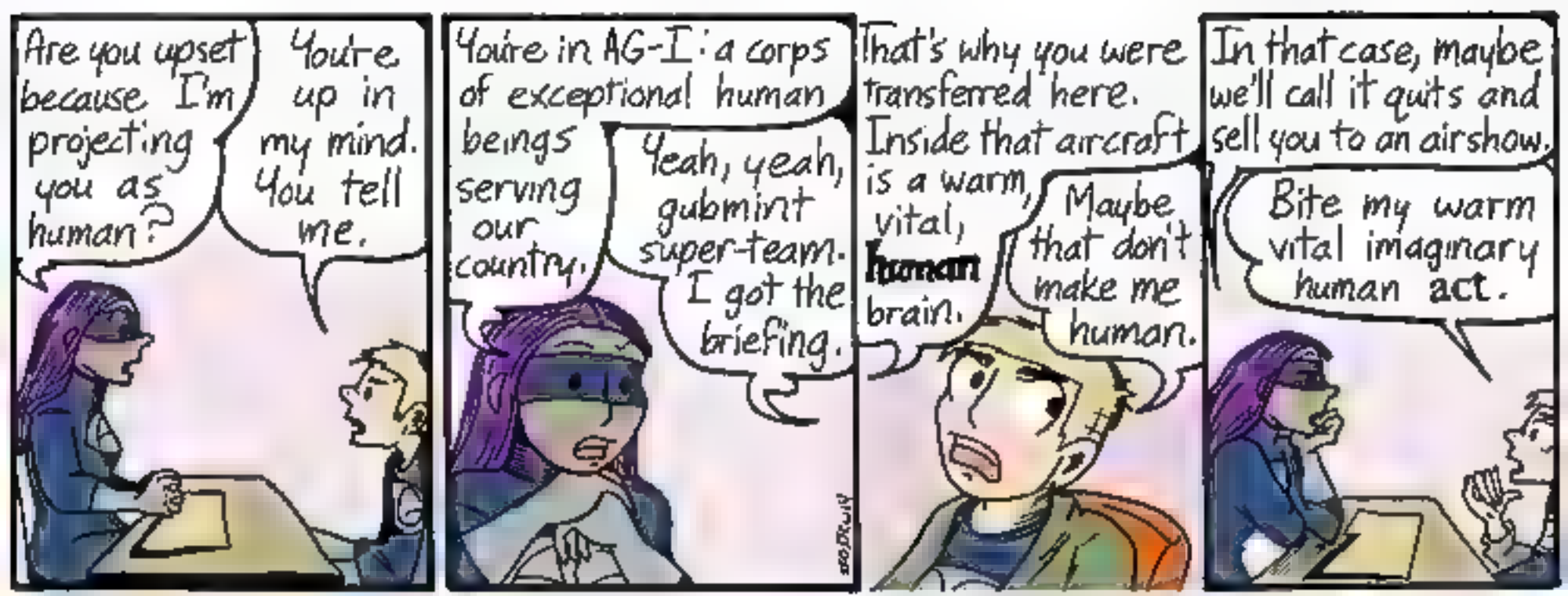

Sitting around binge-watching "America's Got Talent." What kind of life is this?
Seriously, I cannot grok this complaint.
I'm a working dog! I should be working!
You're on paid leave.
You don't understand!
No one understands! Except maybe that dog-balancing act they just voted off.
Christian and Scooby, teach me grace.
Eat a sneaker. You'll feel better.

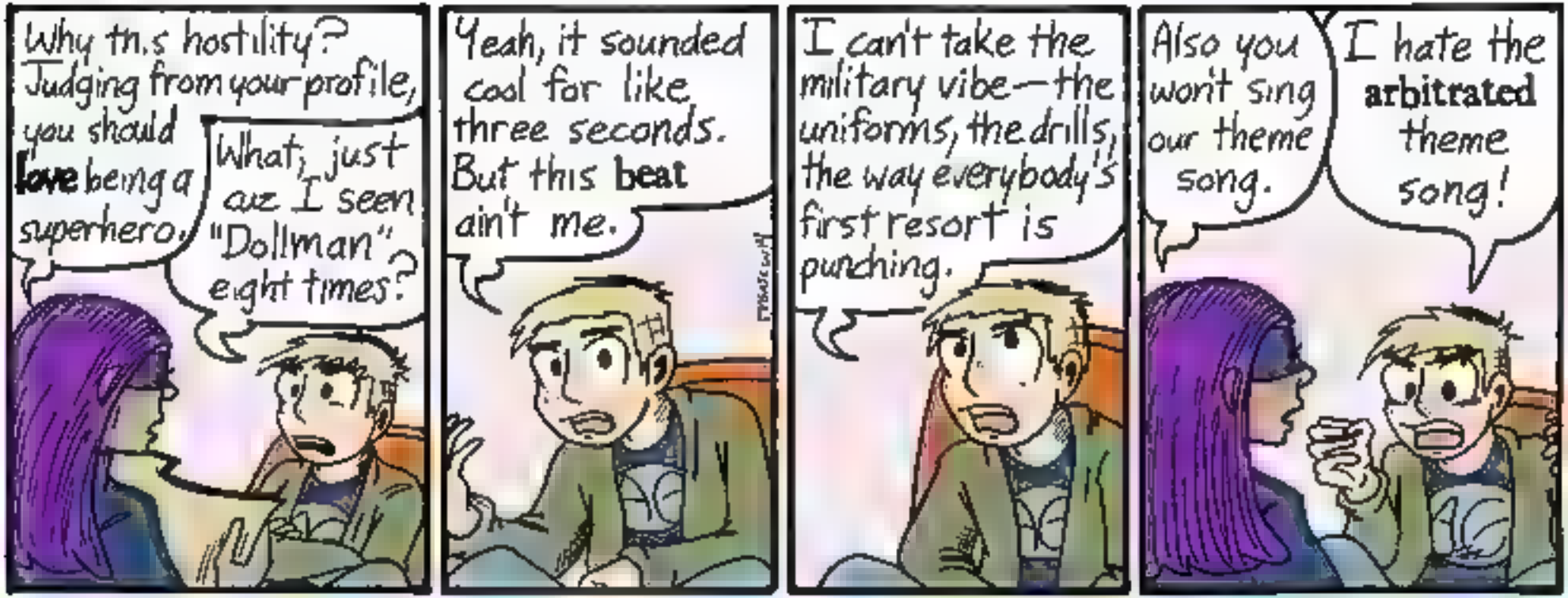

Ran into Tip. He's with the Department of Chicken Tracking.
Y'know, that makes me feel a little better.
I may spend days posting on TV Tropes, but at least no one from the team is doing anything cooler.
Storm be damned! We've got to save those oceanographers!
On it, pipecleaners!
So what's an "Ironic Description Cut"?
That's what I'm trying to explain to the forum!



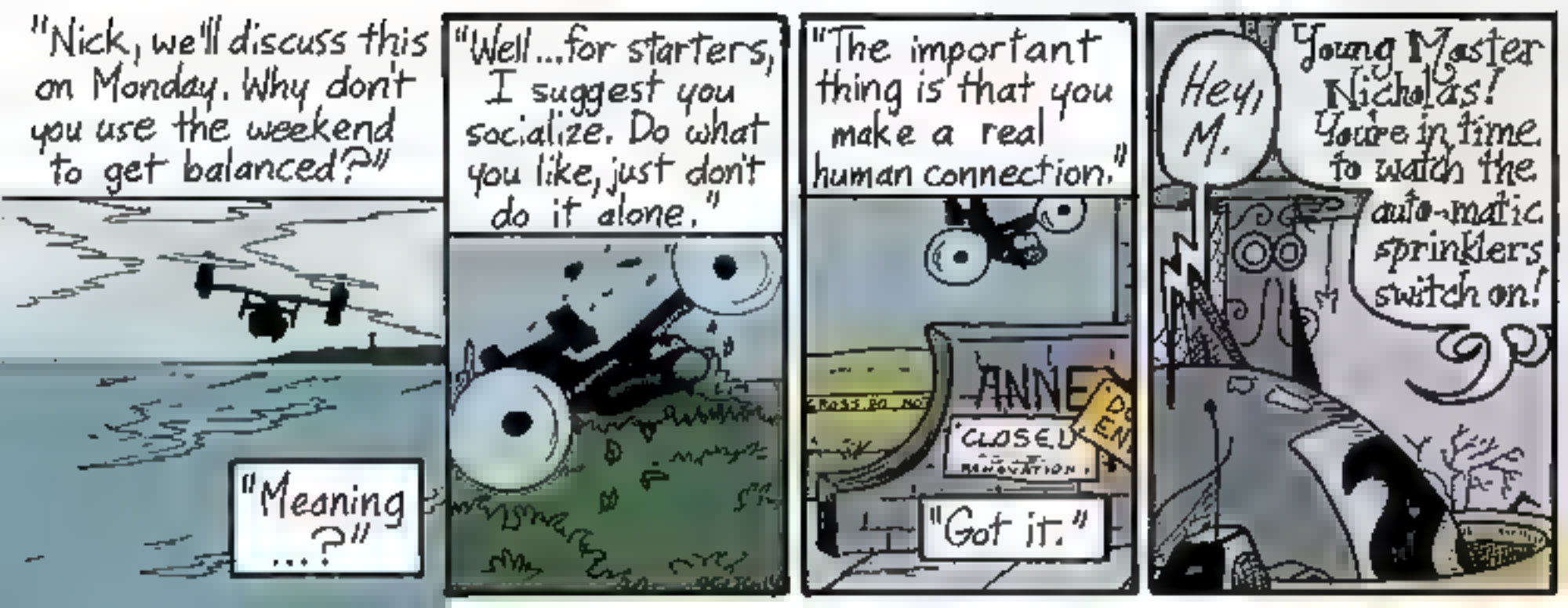

Thanks for flying Me Airways, where our service is better than getting eaten by a blinking octopus.
Nick? My office, please.
Aw, beans, ma'am, I got silt to do with this rescue mission and—
It'll just take a second.
Book that, I'm busYAAAH!
POP
And since the meeting will take place in your mind, I do mean one second.
Rotor failure! Rotor failure!


I ain't used to my boss picking around in my brain, Panoptica.
Please, call me Kate.
I want you to feel free to speak. Let's move this to the Casual Fridays Party Room.
POP
Uh... huh.
I'd feel freer to speak if you shut off my swear filter.
Tarsier Girl is still in therapy from the last time.


Are you upset because I'm projecting you as human?
You're up in my mind. You tell me.
You're in AG-I: a corps of exceptional human beings serving our country.
Yeah, yeah, gubmint super-team. I got the briefing.
That's why you were transferred here. Inside that aircraft is a warm, vital, human brain.
Maybe that don't make me human.
In that case, maybe we'll call it quits and sell you to an airshow.
Bite my warm vital imaginary human act.


Why th.s hostility? Judging from your profile, you should love being a superhero.
What, just cuz I seen "Dollman" eight times?
Yeah, it sounded cool for like three seconds. But this beat ain't me.
I can't take the military vibe—the uniforms, the drills, the way everybody's first resort is punching.
Also you won't sing our theme song.
I hate the arbitrated theme song!

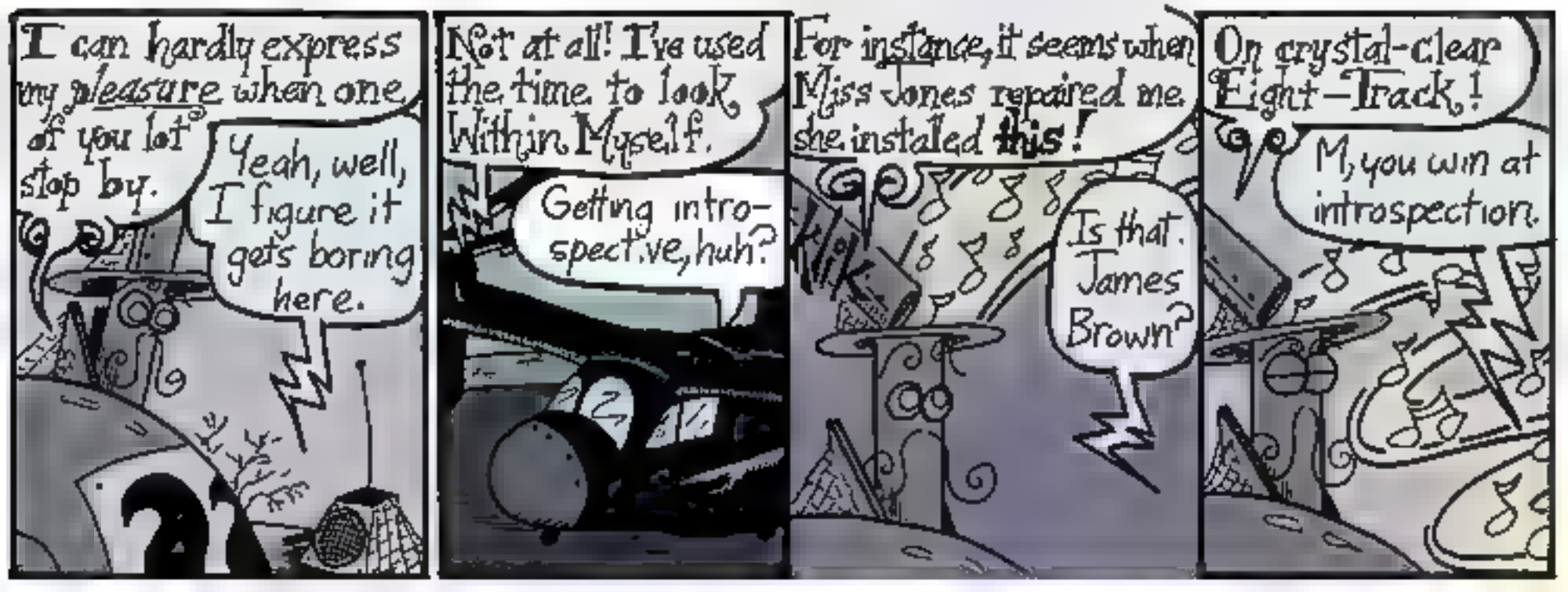

You were late again today.
I wasn't needed. You gots air power.
Speaking of, your invisible plane is a jerk.
Back at SH, I helped apples nobody else was helping. Guess I miss that.
And according to our records, you've been using Cerebriac the Supercomputer to store porn.
Plus I miss that they didn't know swift about IT.
How can there be 1.5 million films about butts?

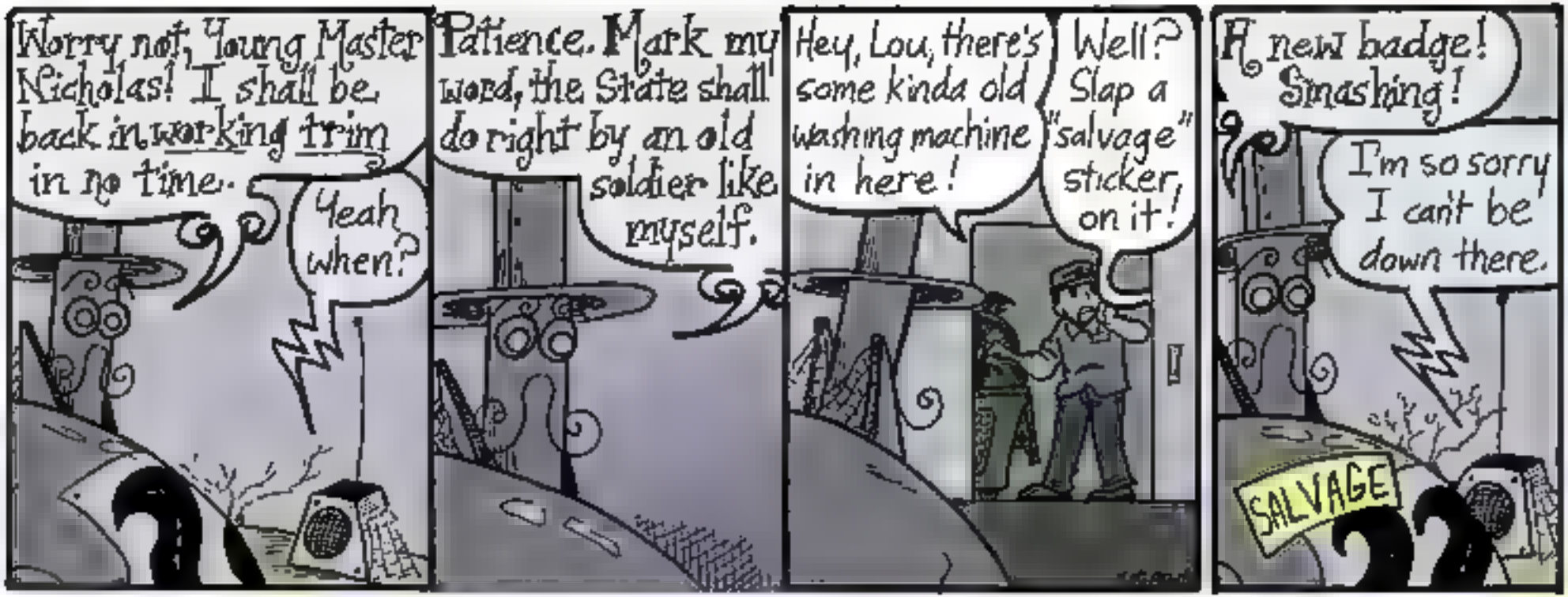

"Nick, we'll discuss this on Monday. Why don't you use the weekend to get balanced?"
"Meaning ...?"
"Well ...for starters, I suggest you socialize. Do what you like, just don't do it alone."
"The important thing is that you make a real human connection."
ANNE
CLOSED
"Got it."
Hey, M.
Young Master Nicholas! You're in time to watch the auto-matic sprinklers switch on!

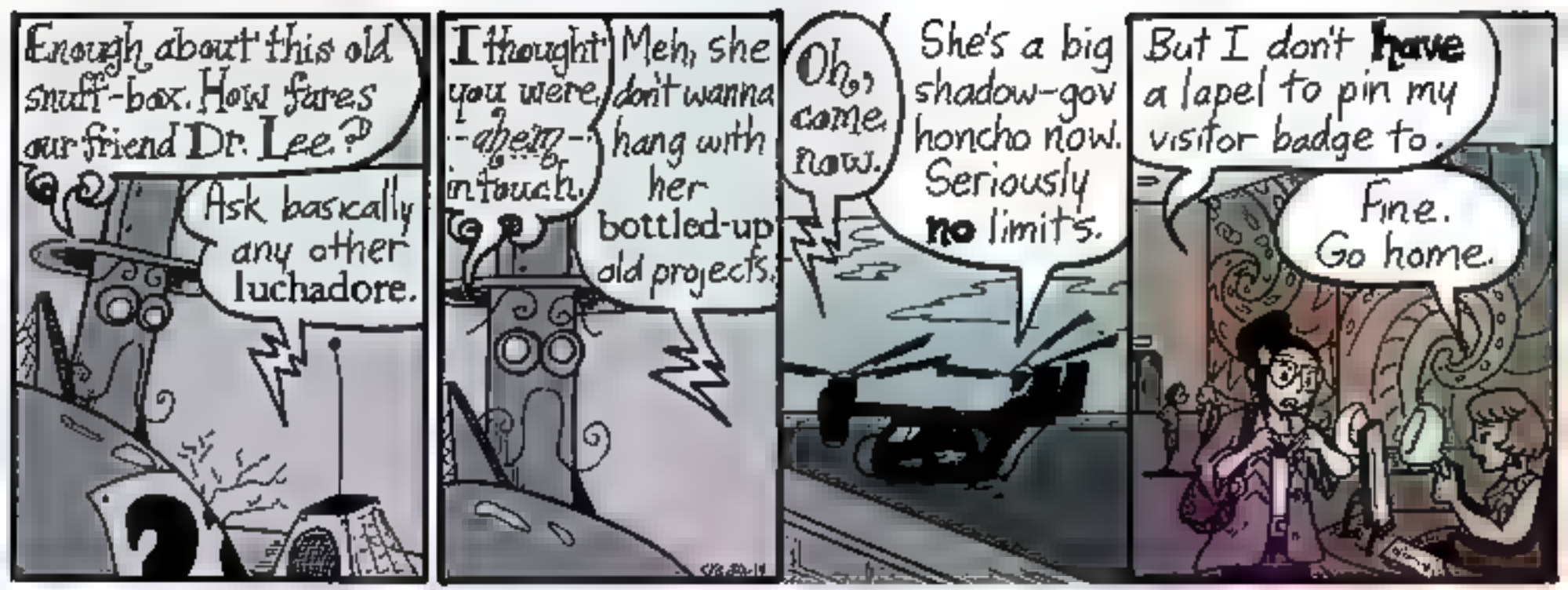
Skin Horse

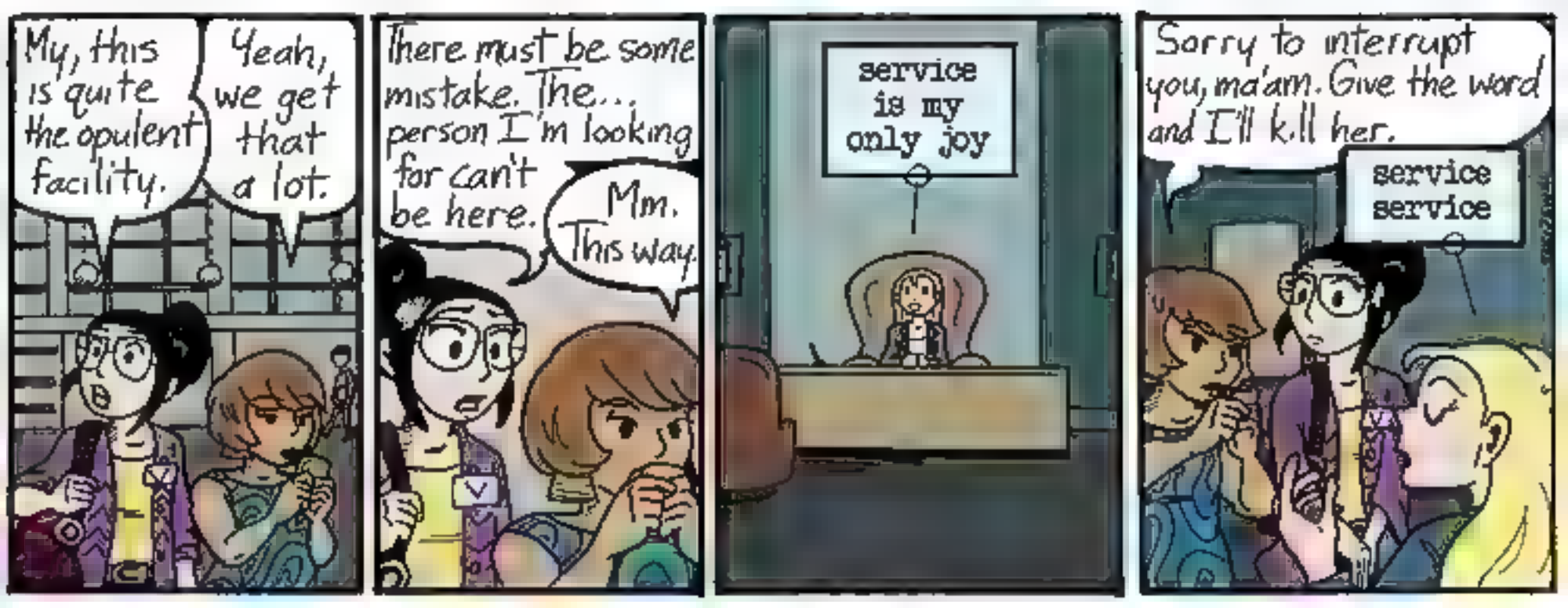
Volume One

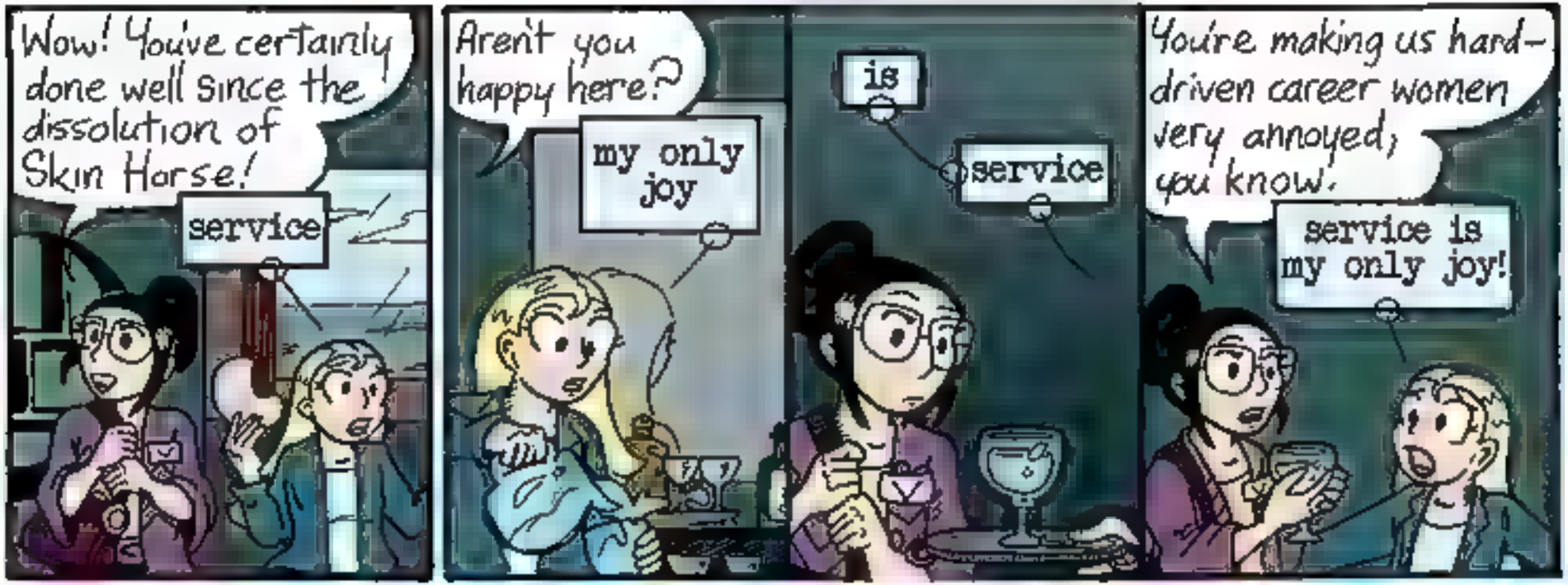


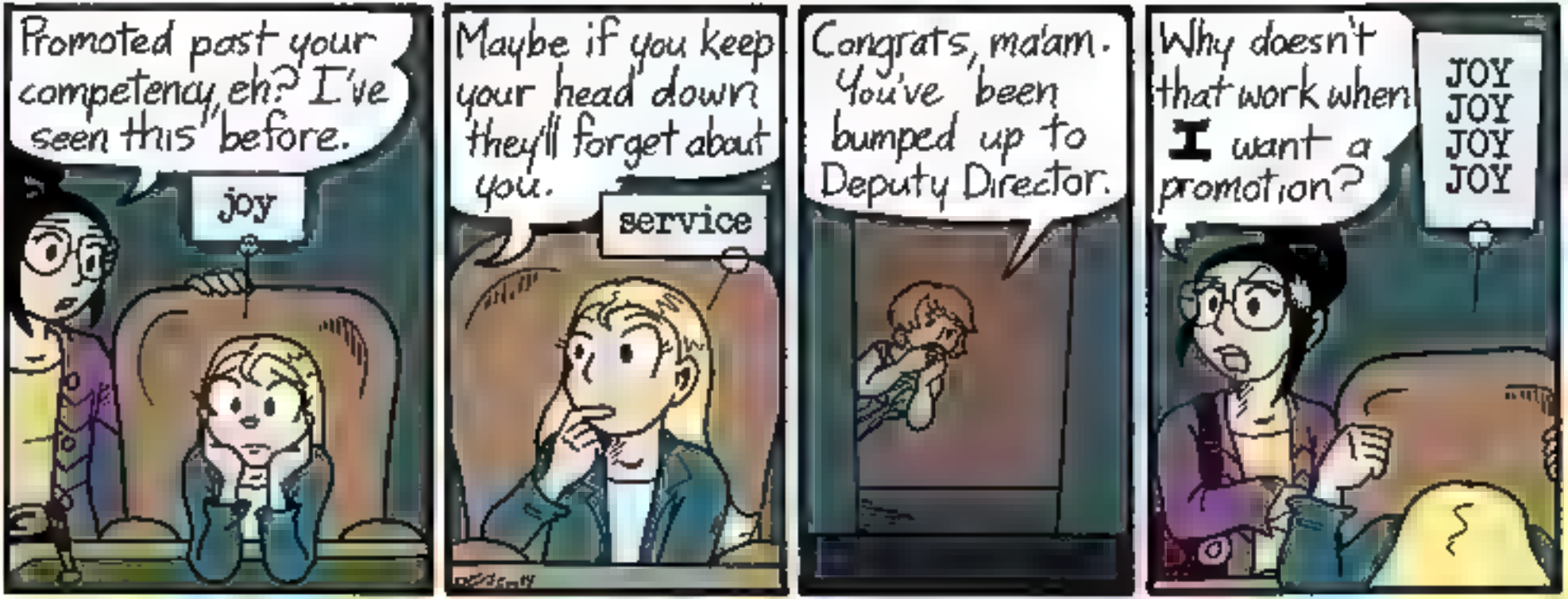

I can hardly express my pleasure when one of you lot stop by.
Yeah, well, I figure it gets boring here.
Not at all! I've used the time to look Within Myself.
Getting introspective, huh?
For instance, it seems when Miss Jones repaired me she installed this!
Klik
Is that James Brown?
Oh crystal-clear Eight-Track!
M, you win at introspection.


Worry not, Young Master Nicholas! I shall be back in working trim in no time.
Yeah when?
Patience. Mark my word, the State shall do right by an old soldier like myself.
Hey, Lou, there's some kinda old washing machine in here!
Well? Slap a "salvage" sticker on it!
A new badge! Smashing!
I'm so sorry I can't be down there.
SALVAGE

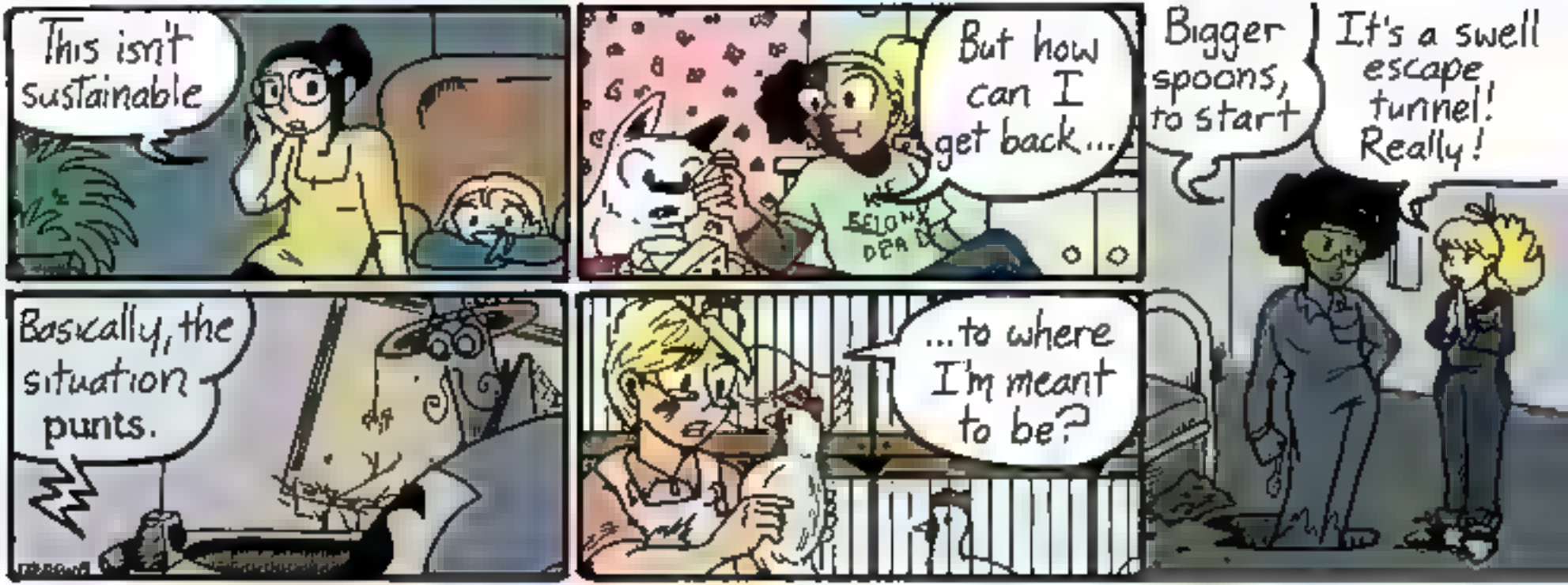

Enough about this old snuff-box. How fares our friend Dr. Lee?
Ask basically any other luchadore.
I thought you were, -ahem- in touch.
Meh, she don't wanna hang with her bottled-up old projects.
Oh, come now.
She's a big shadow-gov honcho now. Seriously no limits.
But I don't have a lapel to pin my visitor badge to.
Fine. Go home.


My, this is quite the opulent facility.
Yeah, we get that a lot.
There must be some mistake. The... person I'm looking for can't be here.
Mm. This way.
service is my only joy
Sorry to interrupt you, ma'am. Give the word and I'll k.ll her.
service service


Wow! You've certainly done well since the dissolution of Skin Horse!
service
Aren't you happy here?
my only joy
is
service
You're making us hard-driven career women very annoyed, you know.
service is my only joy!


Promoted past your competency, eh? I've seen this before.
joy
Maybe if you keep your head down they'll forget about you.
service
Congrats, ma'am. You've been bumped up to Deputy Director.
Why doesn't that work when I want a promotion?
JOY
JOY
JOY
JOY

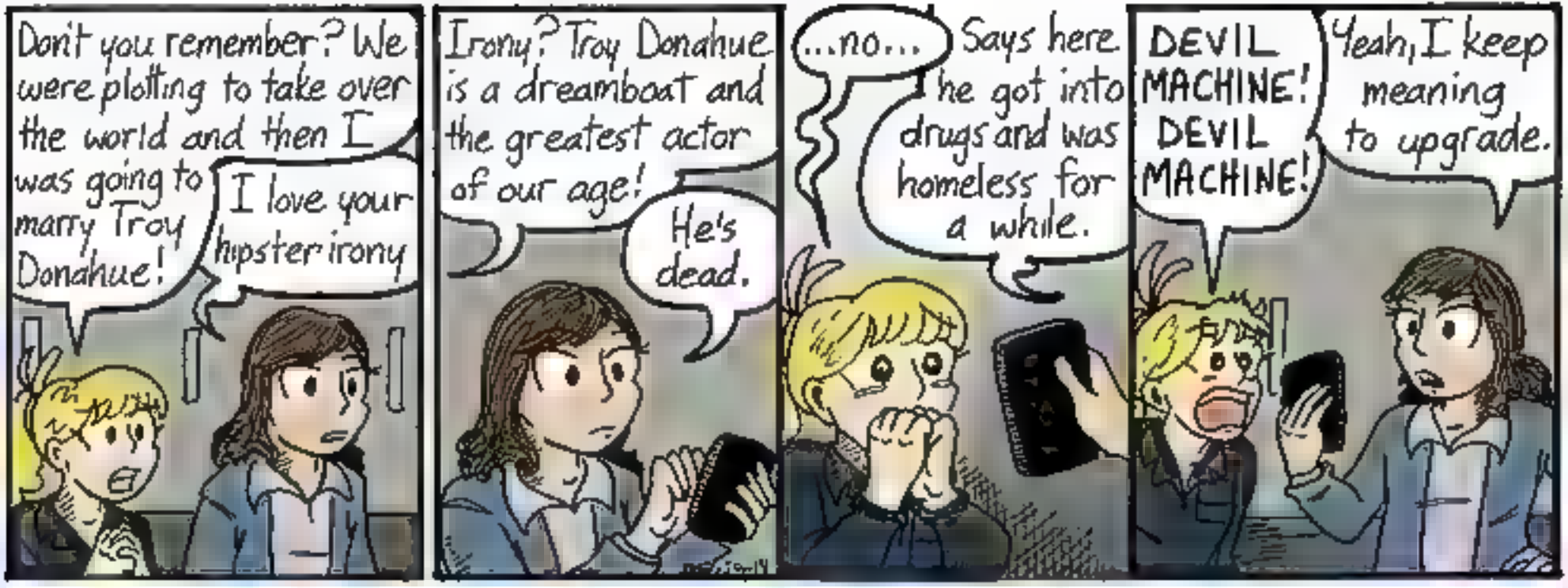

Fun With Baby's Clubfoot
by Shannon K Garrity
Oh no!
What happened to his legs?
UBFC. Ultimate Baby Fighting Championship.
What?
He's hooked on the adreneline.
He's in casts...
Yeah, but you should've seen the other baby.
The other baby fought dirty
I still think it was a really short man.
Excuse me!
Let's tell the next person it was a skydiving accident.
"Count ten Mississippi and pull! How hard is that to remember?"


This isn't sustainable
But how can I get back...
Bigger spoons, to start
It's a swell escape tunnel! Really!
Basically, the situation punts.
...to where I'm meant to be?


I gotta cogitate another plan.
Ohh! What if we use ;gasp; feminine wiles?
You freaky chick!
It's what Patty Duke did when she needed to keep Frankie Avalon in Brooklyn.
But that jive only works on unhep chuckle-heads.
Why, hel-lo. I'm Echo Bravo and I just scored the gig of guarding you fine ladies.
Imogene, fetch my economy-size Charlie perfume.
I like you. You're feisty.

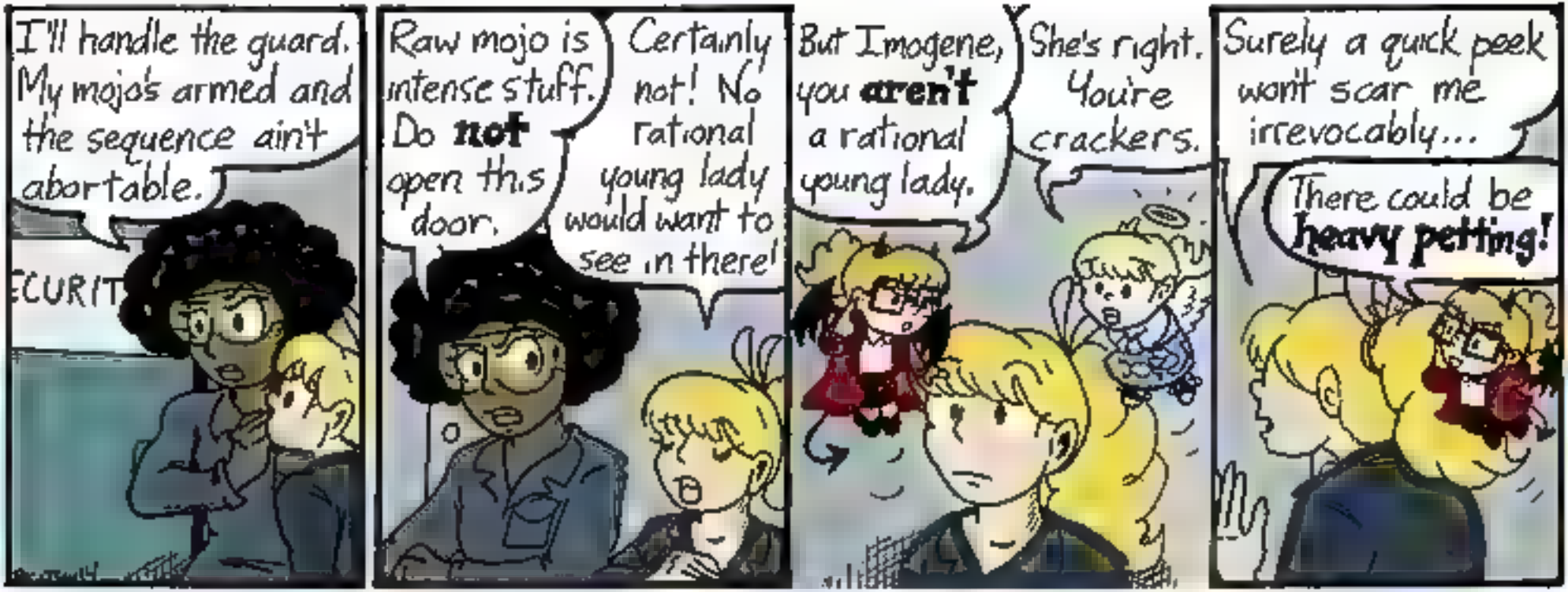

Last chance, Imogene. We busting out together?
I should wait for Debbi...
Debbi's been down in Fornax Level for days.
I've had time to learn her futuristic lingo.
Hey, sorry I didn't text. There's no cell signal downstairs.
bip bip
Grody to the max!
Should call 'em stupid phones, right?

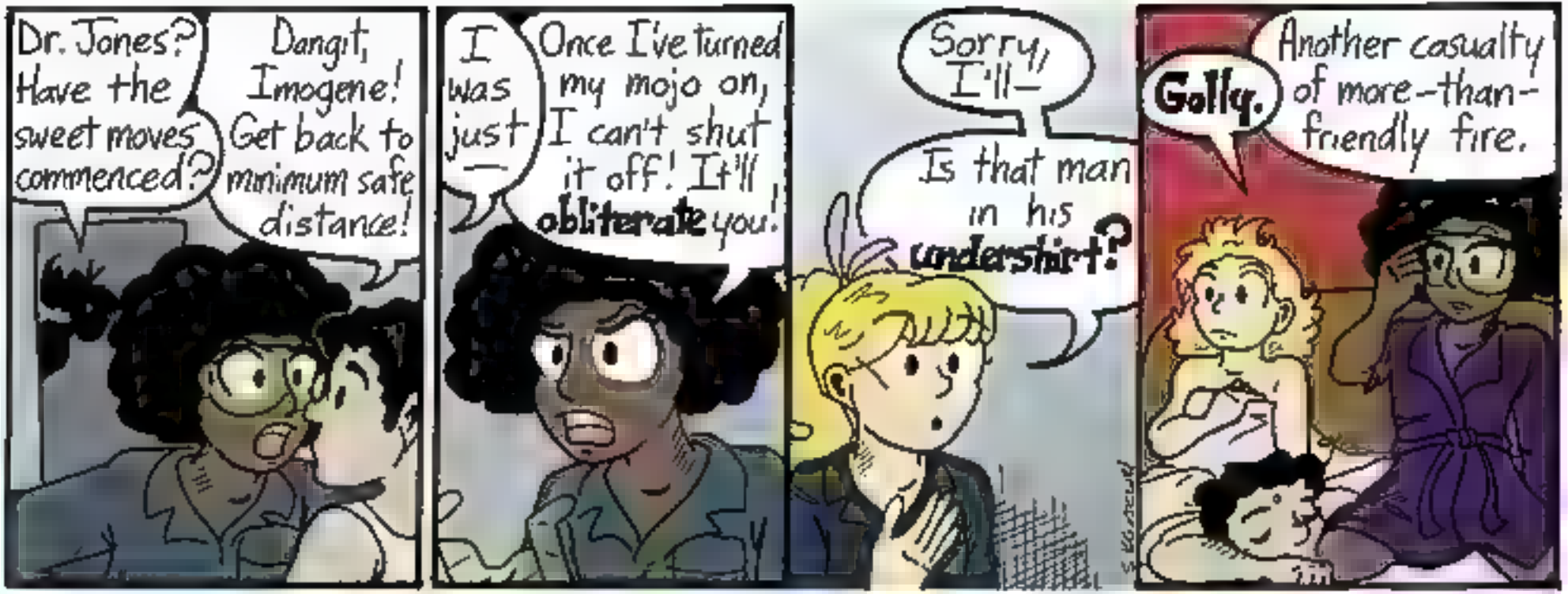

Sweet Christmas, Debbi, what's up with you?
Just back from a coding job.
This ain't an office! It's a science hoosegow!
Job feels that way at times, eh?
I... I saved your research for you...
Who still uses floppy disks?
Why's she down on her keen Punchcards of Tomorrow?
The Cure.
Who still listens to the Cure?

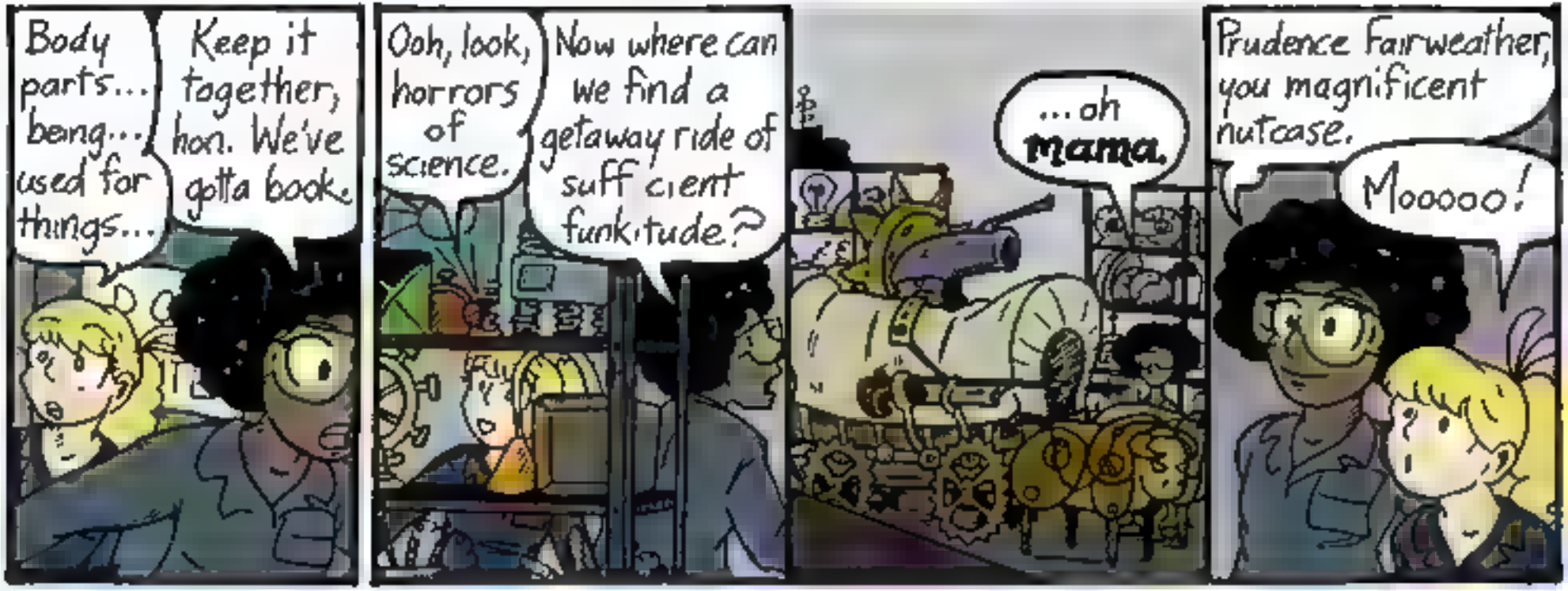

Don't you remember? We were plotting to take over the world and then I was going to marry Troy Donahue!
I love your hipster irony
Irony? Troy Donahue is a dreamboat and the greatest actor of our age!
He's dead.
...no...
Says here he got into drugs and was homeless for a while.
DEVIL MACHINE! DEVIL MACHINE!
Yeah, I keep meaning to upgrade.

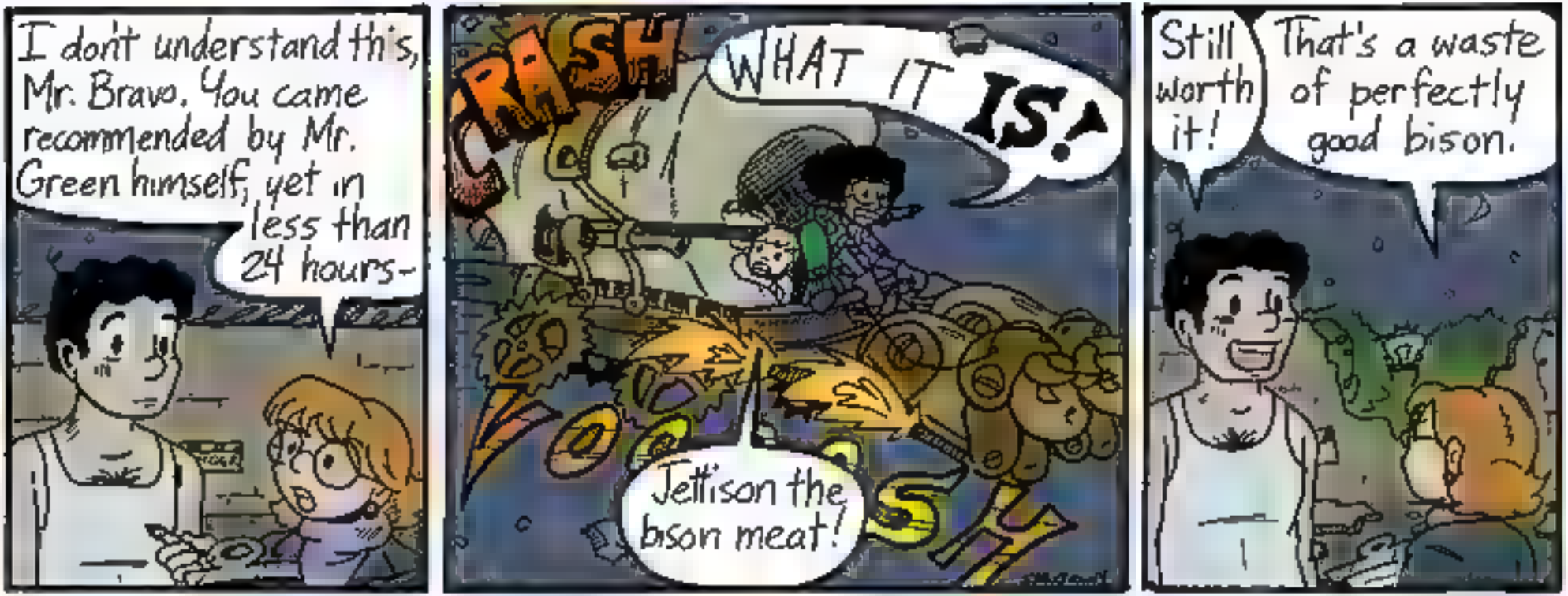

Guess the Cure puts your reality blinders up and makes you a jackass.
Let's...let's blow this joint!
You sure you're ready to fly?
Yes! I'll seduce the guard!
Slip this note inviting him to Sadie Hawkins in his locker! I'll prepare a frosty chocolate malt!
Do you know what genitals are, exactly?
Two straws!

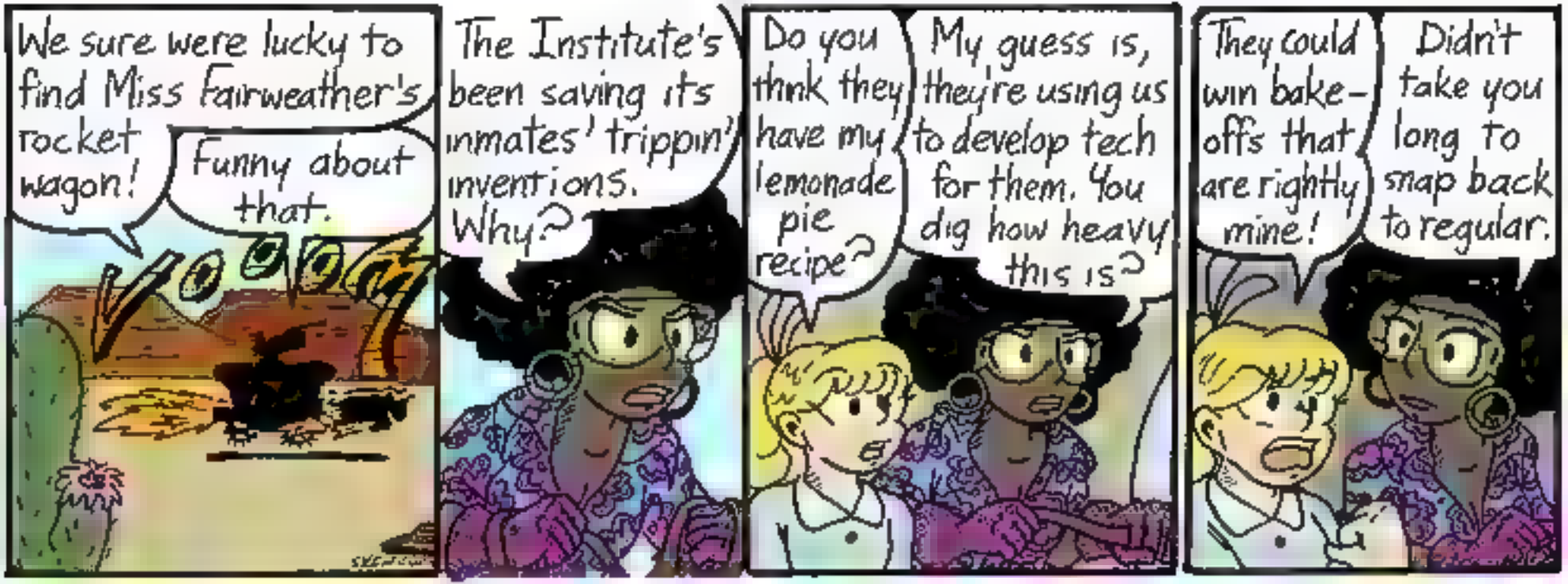

Actually
it's about ethics in video game journalism


I'll handle the guard. My mojo's armed and the sequence ain't abortable.
ECURIT
Raw mojo is intense stuff. Do **not** open this door.
Certainly not! No rational young lady would want to see in there!
But Imogene, you **aren't** a rational young lady.
She's right. You're crackers.
Surely a quick peek won't scar me irrevocably...
There could be **heavy petting!**

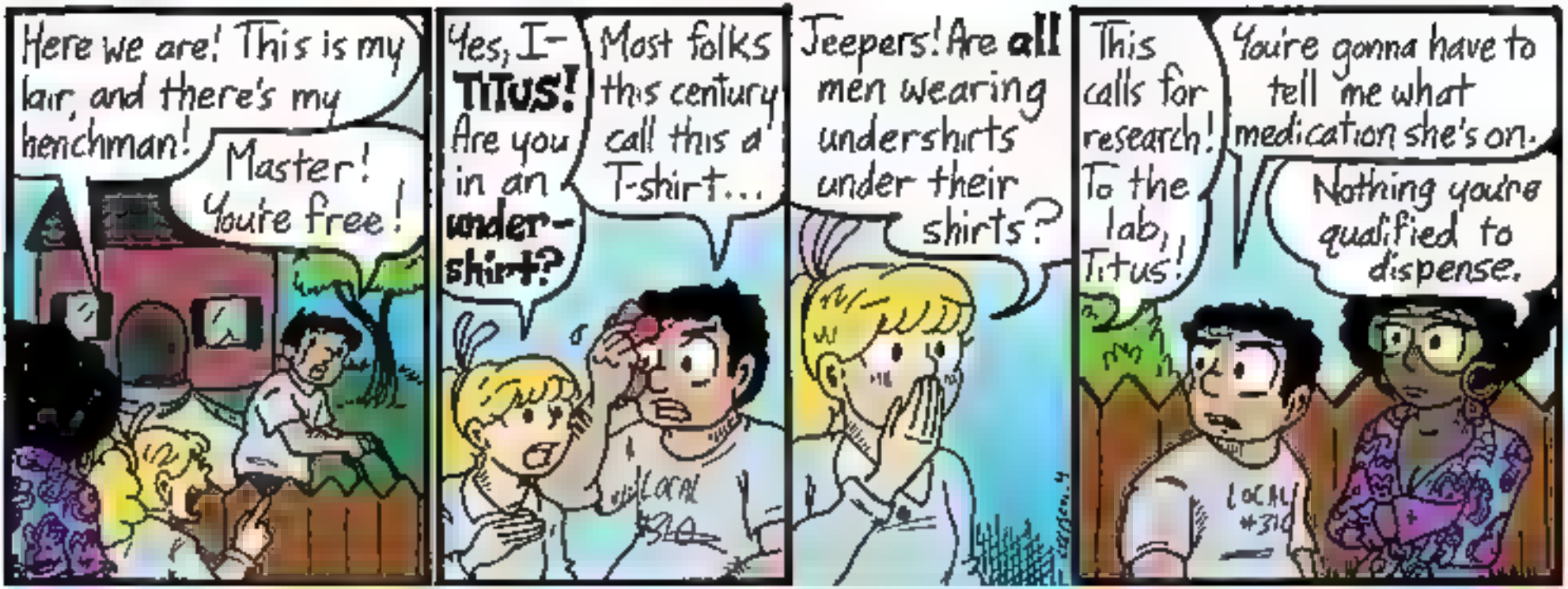

Dr. Jones? Have the sweet moves commenced?
Dangit, Imogene! Get back to minimum safe distance!
I was just—
Once I've turned my mojo on, I can't shut it off! It'll obliterate you!
Sorry, I'll—
Is that man in his undershirt?
Golly.
Another casualty of more-than-friendly fire.

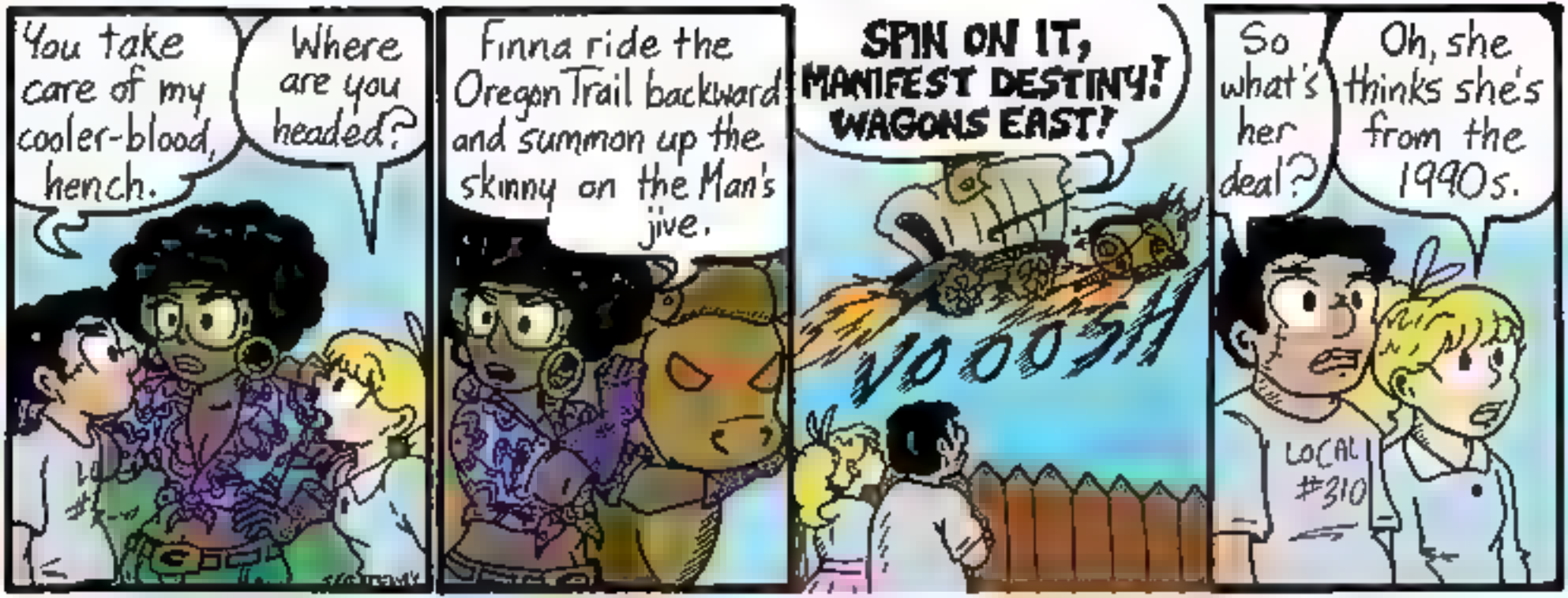

Body parts... being... used for things...
Keep it together, hon. We've gotta book.
Ooh, look, horrors of science.
Now where can we find a getaway ride of suff cient funk·itude?
...oh mama.
Prudence Fairweather, you magnificent nutcase.
Mooooo!

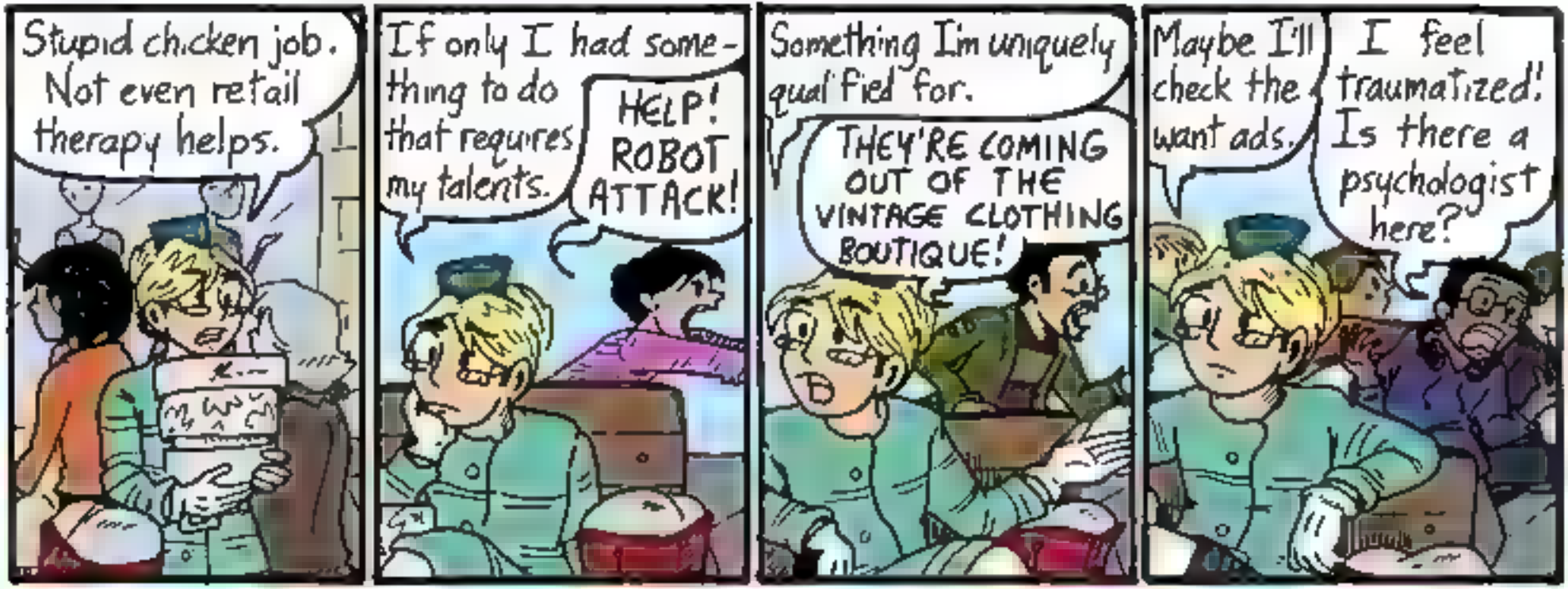

I don't understand this, Mr. Bravo. You came recommended by Mr. Green himself, yet in less than 24 hours-
CRASH
WHAT IT IS!
Jettison the bison meat!
Still worth it!
That's a waste of perfectly good bison.

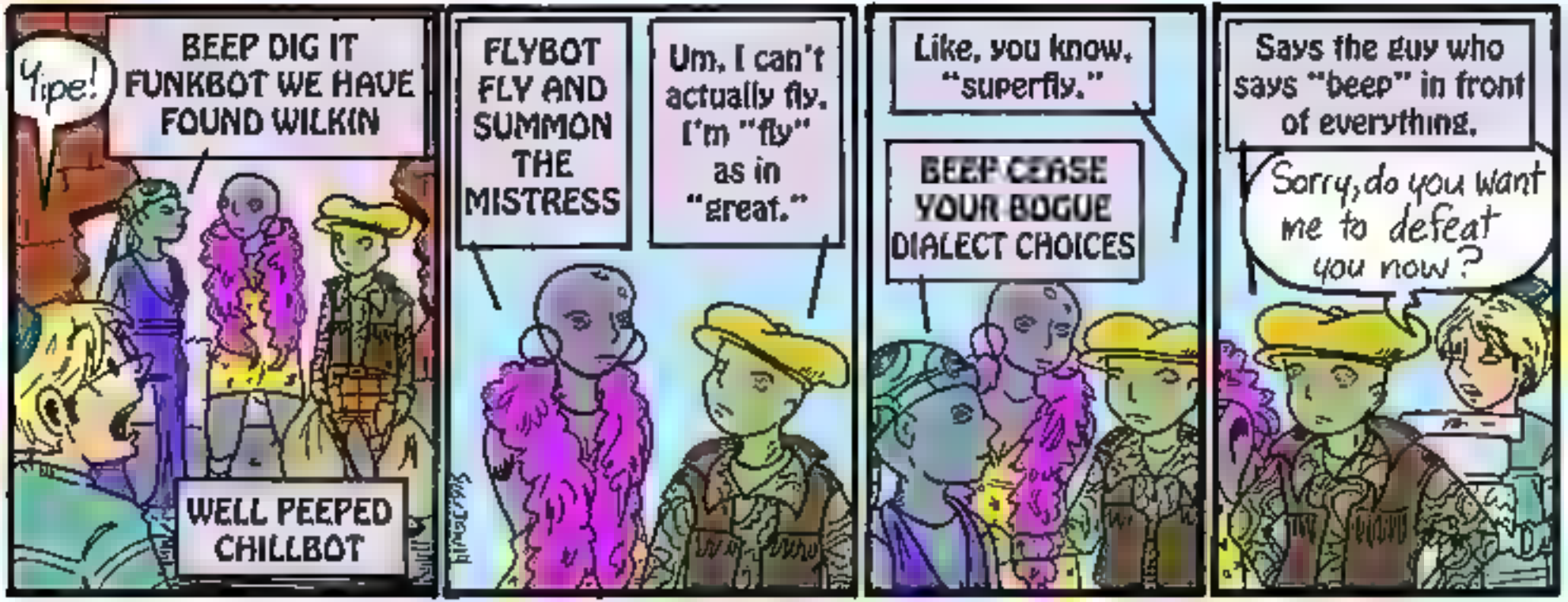

We sure were lucky to find Miss Fairweather's rocket wagon!
Funny about that.
The Institute's been saving its inmates' trippin' inventions. Why?
Do you think they have my lemonade pie recipe?
My guess is, they're using us to develop tech for them. You dig how heavy this is?
They could win bake-offs that are rightly mine!
Didn't take you long to snap back to regular.

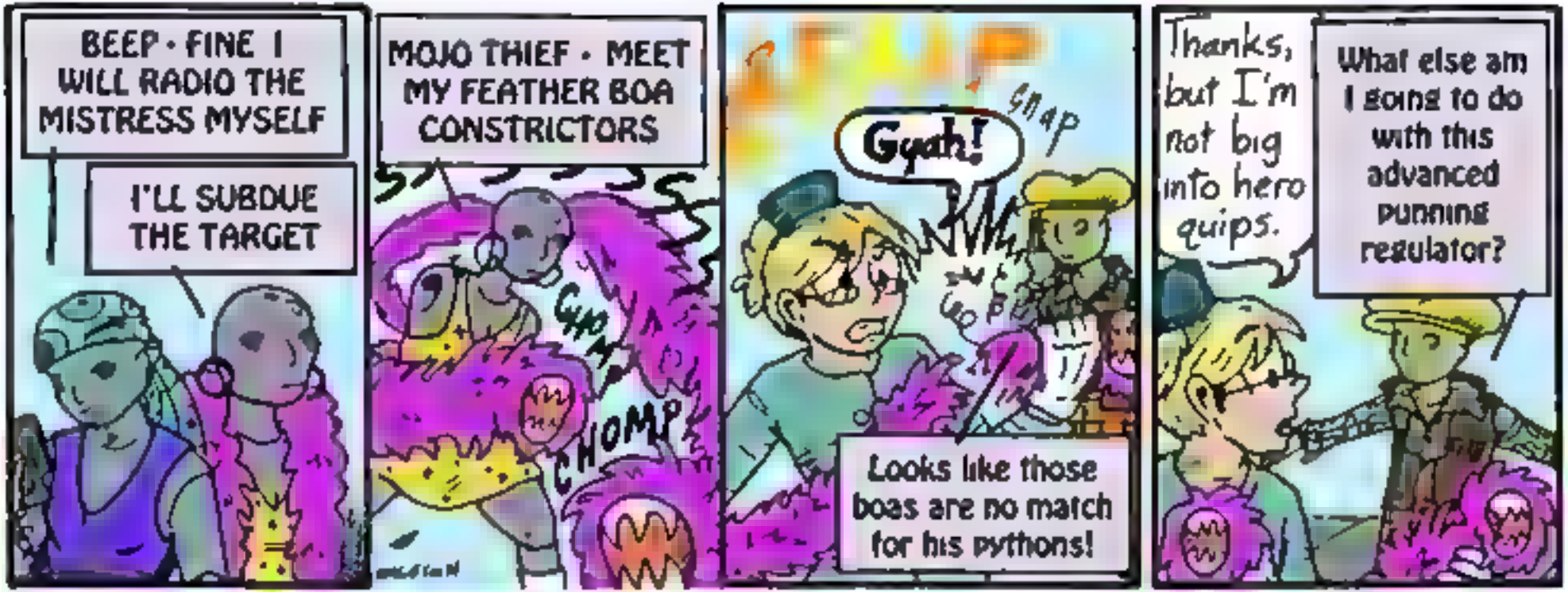

According to my shadow-gov connection, Project "Skin Horse" got 86'd.
Guess we won't see your steady after all.
He ain't my— Look, this gets shadier by the tick. I aim to investigate.
Maybe your "connection" knows something.
negatory
this cat just another brother on the robo-dole
I need to make more contacts.
hey blazin mama
Oh no! I know what that's about!


Here we are! This is my lair, and there's my henchman!
Master! You're free!
Yes, I- TITUS! Are you in an under-shirt?
Most folks this century call this a T-shirt...
Jeepers! Are all men wearing undershirts under their shirts?
This calls for research! To the lab, Titus!
You're gonna have to tell me what medication she's on.
Nothing you're qualified to dispense.

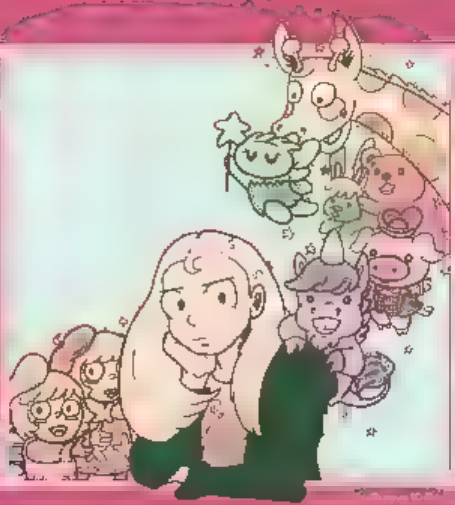

You take care of my cooler-blood, hench.
Where are you headed?
Finna ride the Oregon Trail backward and summon up the skinny on the Man's jive.
SPIN ON IT, MANIFEST DESTINY! WAGONS EAST!
VOOOSH
So what's her deal?
Oh, she thinks she's from the 1990s.
LOCAL #310

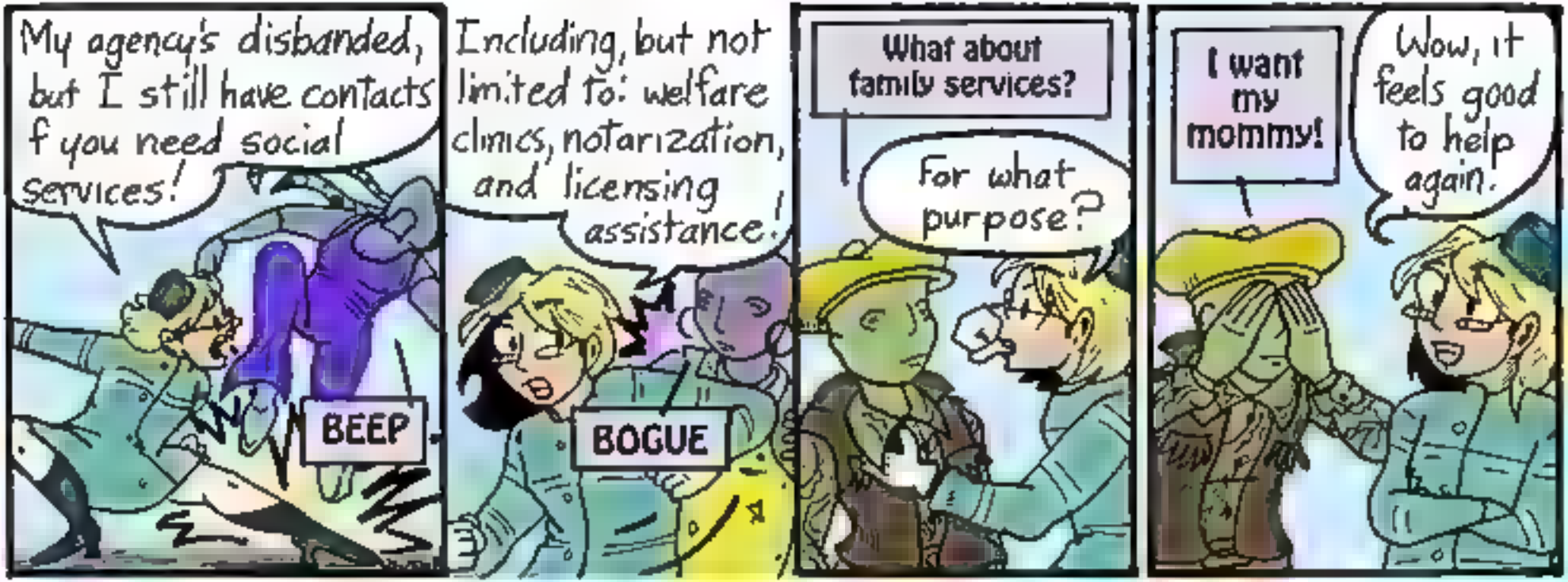

Stupid chicken job. Not even retail therapy helps.
If only I had something to do that requires my talents.
HELP! ROBOT ATTACK!
Something I'm uniquely qualified for.
THEY'RE COMING OUT OF THE VINTAGE CLOTHING BOUTIQUE!
Maybe I'll check the want ads.
I feel traumatized! Is there a psychologist here?

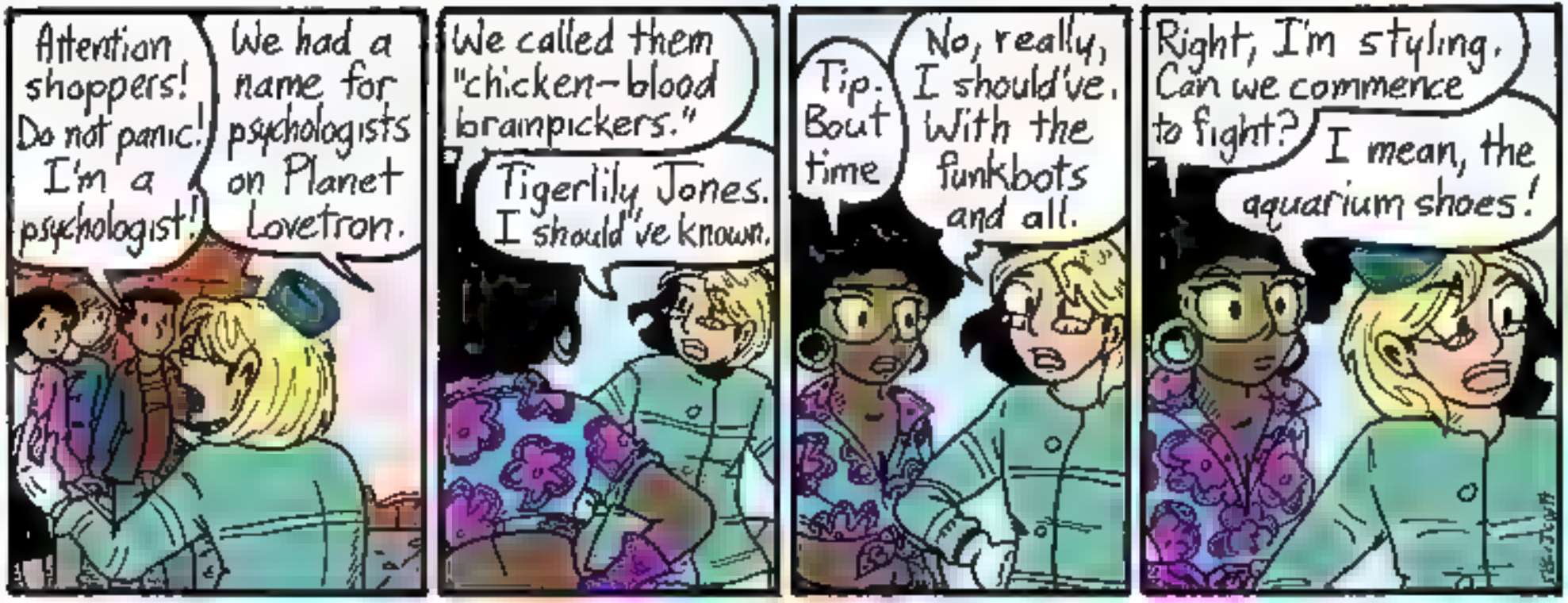

Yipe!
BEEP DIG IT FUNKBOT WE HAVE FOUND WILKIN
WELL PEEPED CHILLBOT
FLYBOT FLY AND SUMMON THE MISTRESS
Um, I can't actually fly. I'm "fly" as in "great."
Like, you know, "superfly."
BEEP CEASE YOUR BOGUE DIALECT CHOICES
Says the guy who says "beep" in front of everything.
Sorry, do you want me to defeat you now?


BEEP · FINE I WILL RADIO THE MISTRESS MYSELF
I'LL SUBDUE THE TARGET
MOJO THIEF · MEET MY FEATHER BOA CONSTRICTORS
CHOMP
CHOMP
SNAP
Gyah!
Looks like those boas are no match for his pythons!
Thanks, but I'm not big into hero quips.
What else am I going to do with this advanced punning regulator?

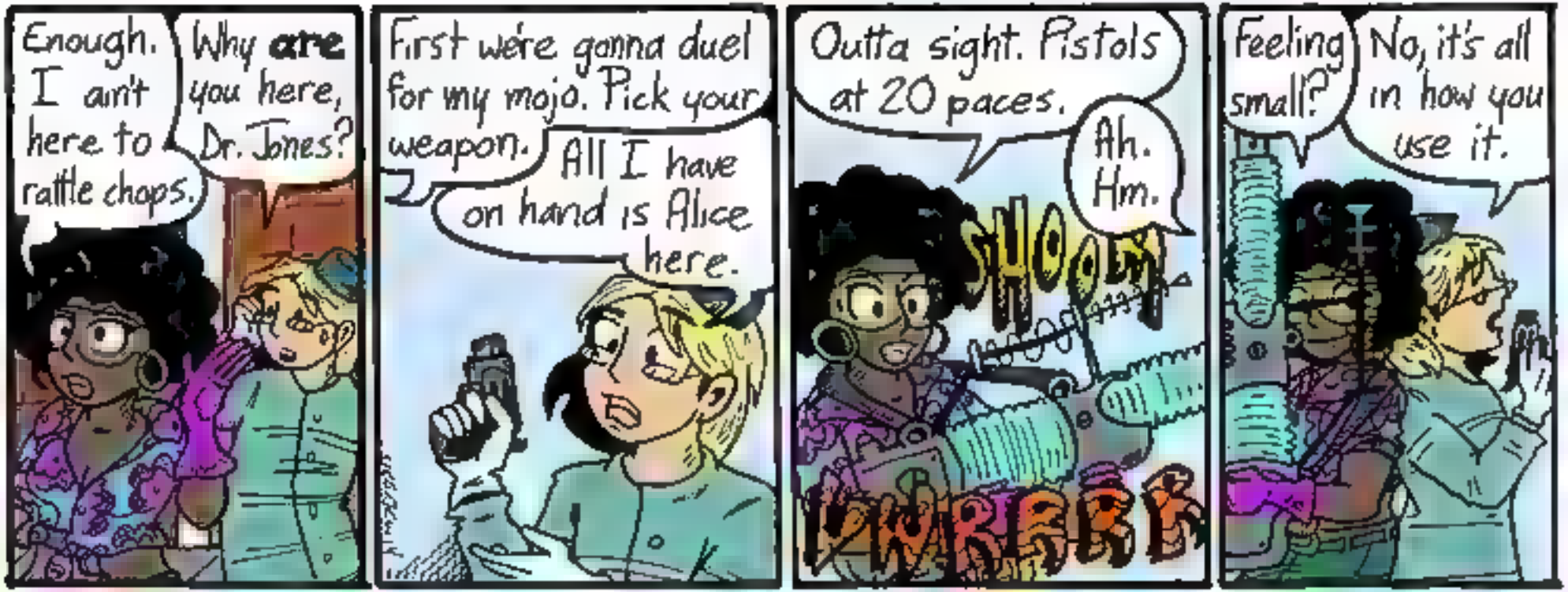

BEEP YOU MAY HAVE DEFEATED FUNKBOT BUT YOU WILL NOT DEFEAT ME
BEEP INSIDE EACH OF THESE AQUARIUM HEEL SHOES IS A DEADLY ROBOT PIRANHA
nar nar
nar
KICK
potnk
BEEP OKAY IN AN AQUATIC SETTING THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN TERRIFYING
You ruined a pair of shoes. Now it's personal.
flop
nar
nar
flop
nar

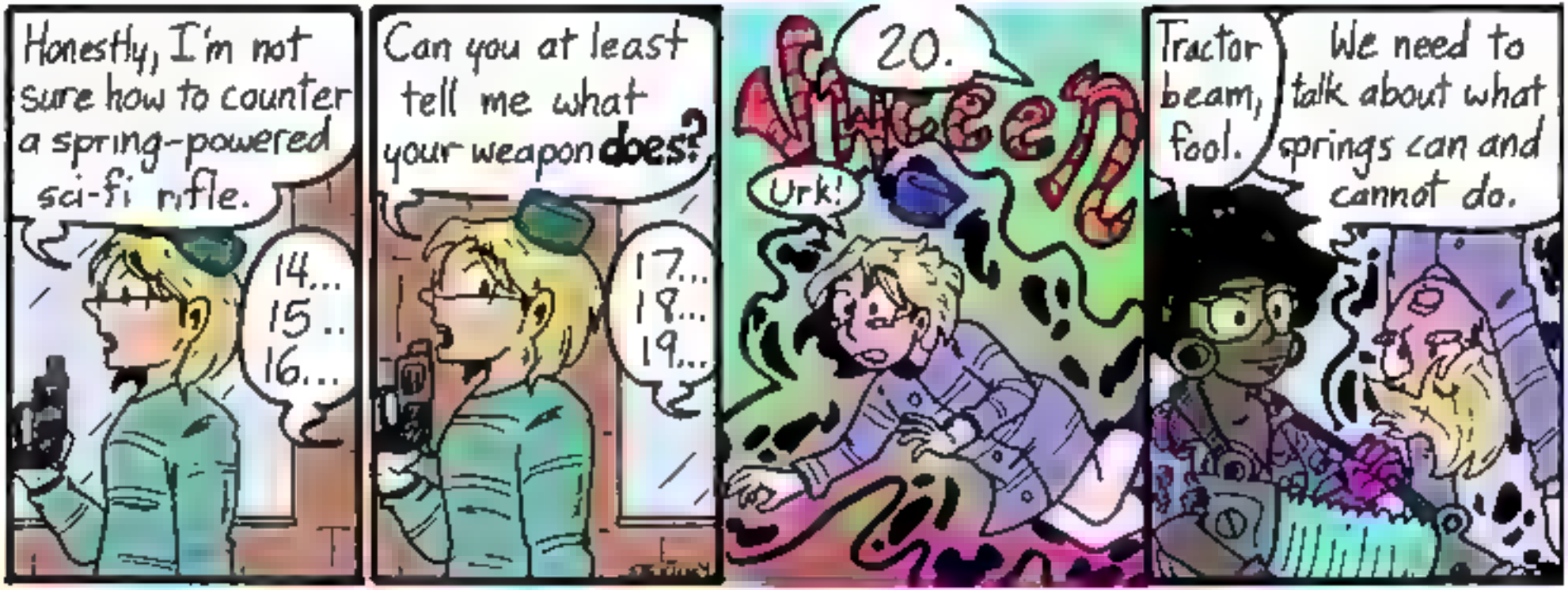


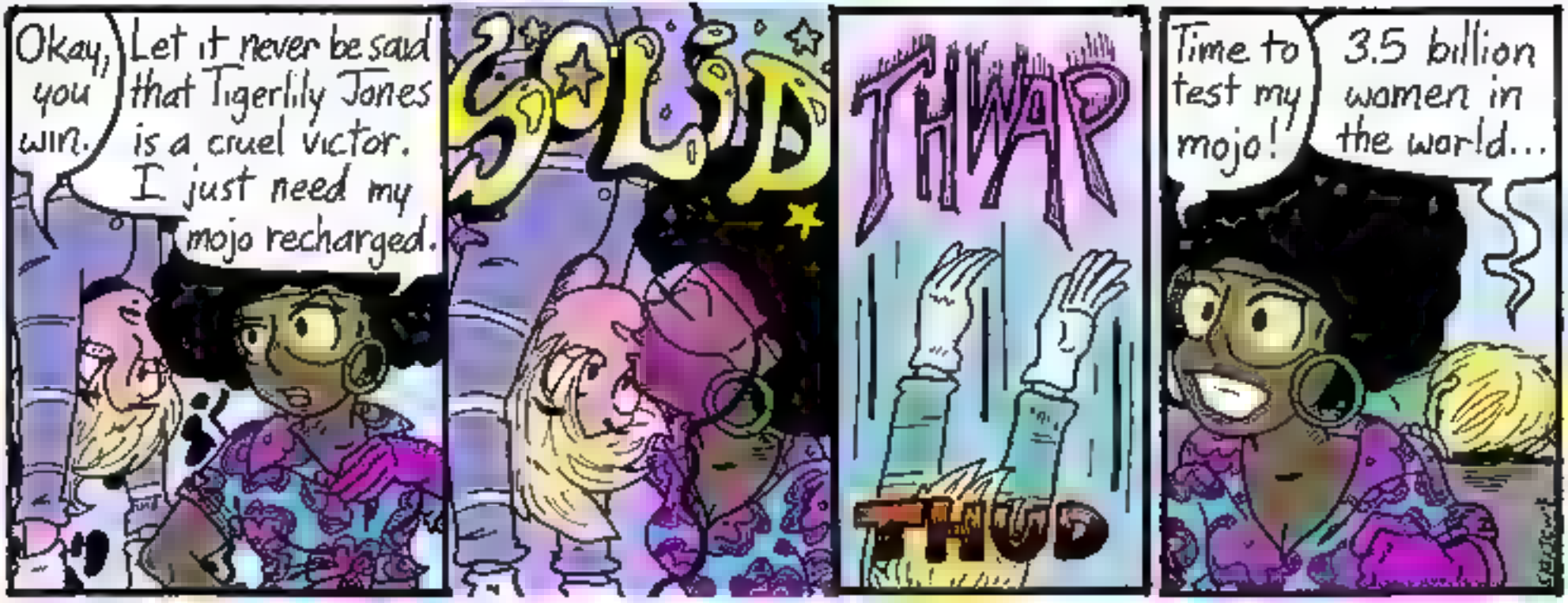

My agency's disbanded, but I still have contacts if you need social services!
BEEP
Including, but not limited to: welfare clinics, notarization, and licensing assistance!
BOGUE
What about family services?
For what purpose?
I want my mommy!
Wow, it feels good to help again.


Attention shoppers! Do not panic! I'm a psychologist!
We had a name for psychologists on Planet Lovetron.
We called them "chicken-blood brainpickers."
Tigerlily Jones. I should've known.
Tip. Bout time
No, really, I should've. With the funkbots and all.
Right, I'm styling. Can we commence to fight?
I mean, the aquarium shoes!

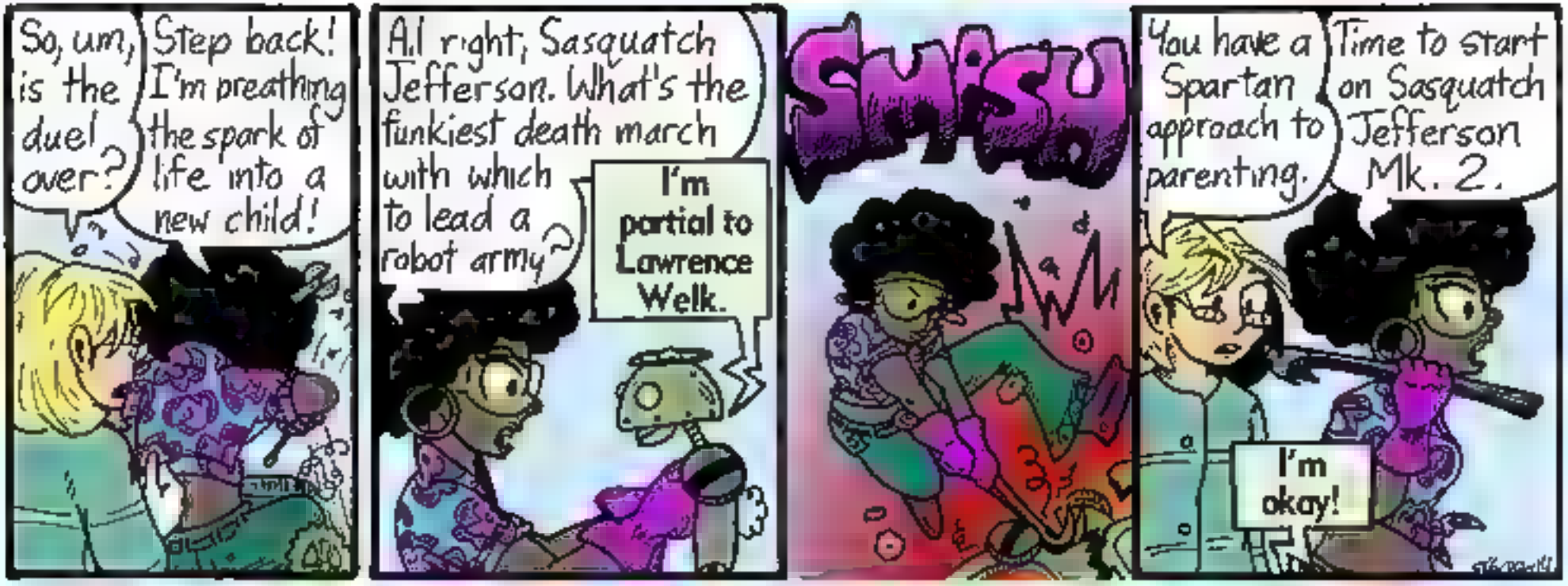

Out of the asylum, into the vintage consignment stores.
Had to get your attention some way, crackerjack.
I should call the police
But you won't. I've got something you want.
And what's that?
Me.
If you think I'd endanger the public for my own gratification, then
oh god yes.
And this macramé belt. Check it out.

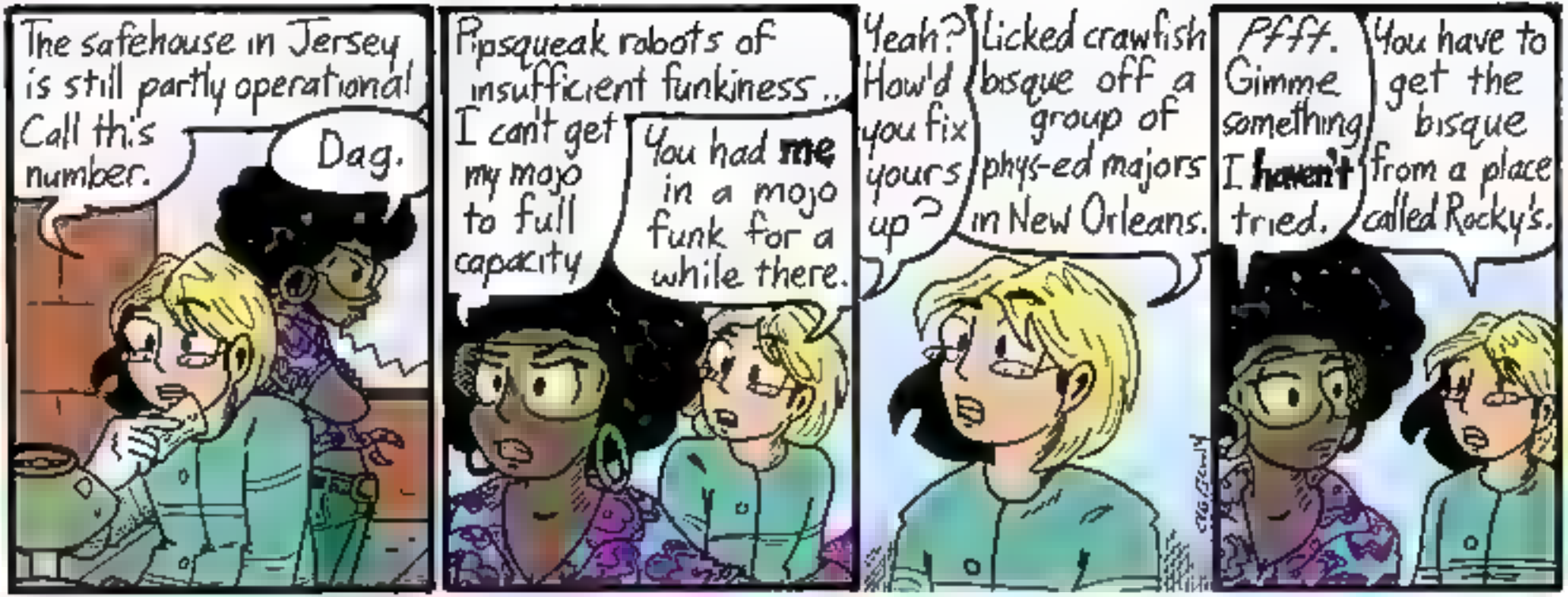

Enough. I ain't here to rattle chops.
Why are you here, Dr. Jones?
First we're gonna duel for my mojo. Pick your weapon.
All I have on hand is Alice here.
Outta sight. Pistols at 20 paces.
Ah. Hm.
SHOOM
WRRRR
Feeling small?
No, it's all in how you use it.

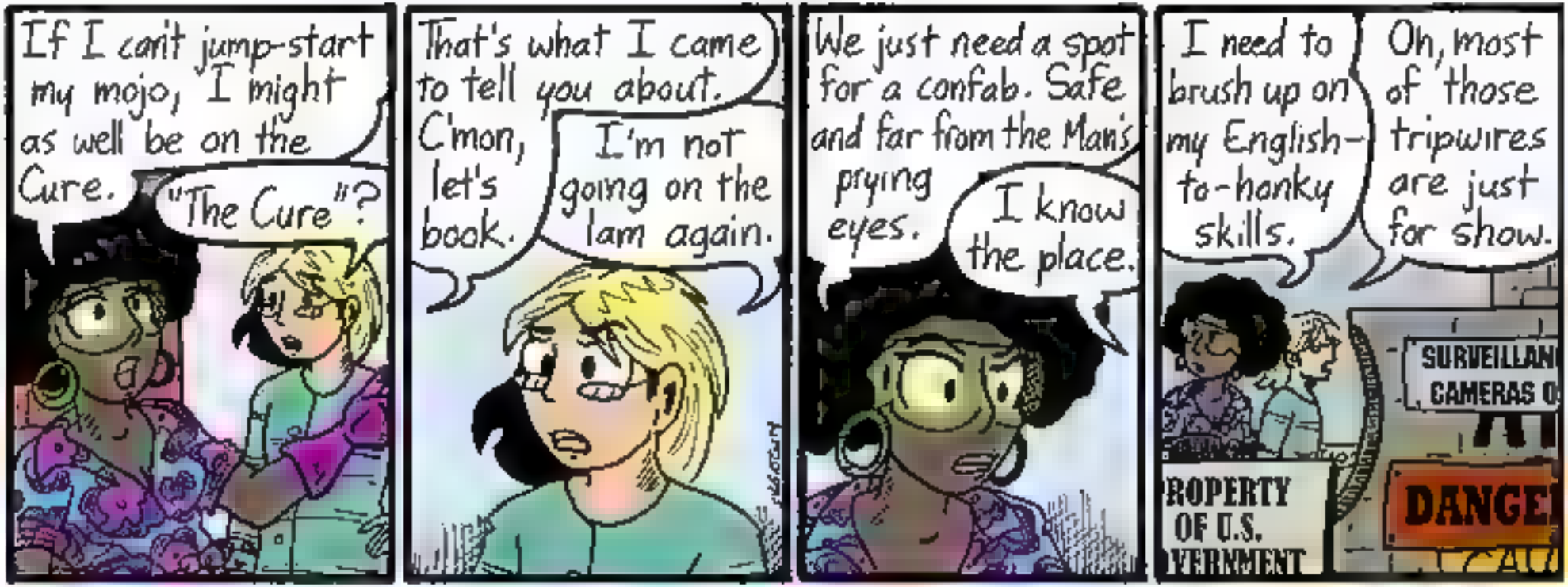

Honestly, I'm not sure how to counter a spring-powered sci-fi rifle.
14...
15..
16...
Can you at least tell me what your weapon does?
17...
18...
19...
20.
Urk!
Tractor beam, fool.
We need to talk about what springs can and cannot do.


Okay, you win.
Let it never be said that Tigerlily Jones is a cruel victor. I just need my mojo recharged.
SOLID
THWAP
THUD
Time to test my mojo!
3.5 billion women in the world...

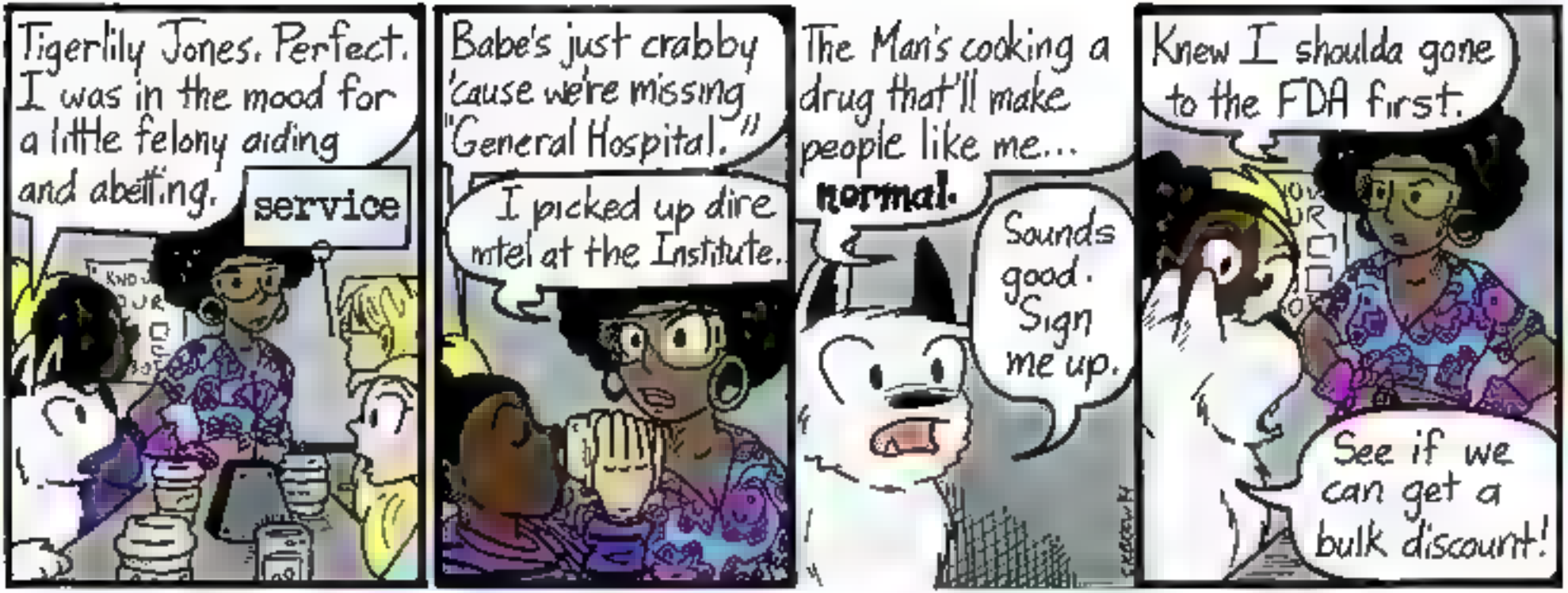

LOADOUT
STATS
HEAVY
THE PHOTON

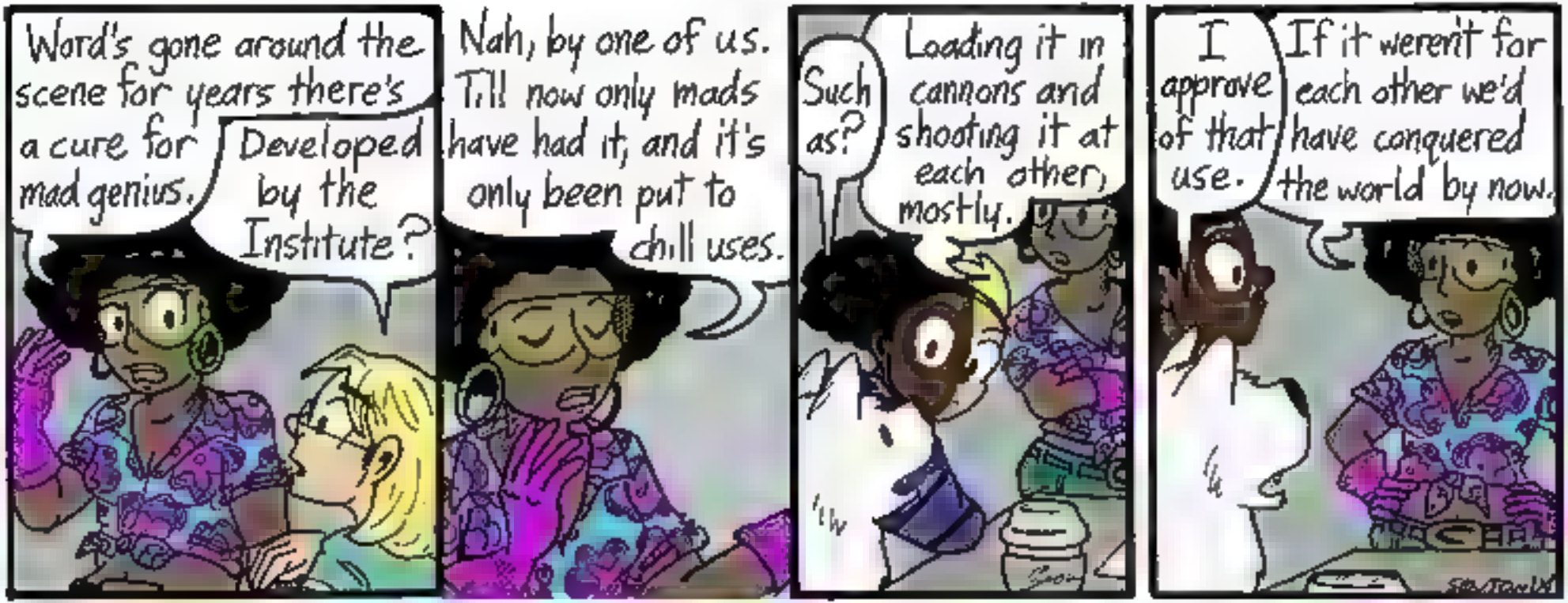

So, um, is the duel over?
Step back! I'm breathing the spark of life into a new child!
Al right, Sasquatch Jefferson. What's the funkiest death march with which to lead a robot army?
I'm partial to Lawrence Welk.
SNIGSU
You have a Spartan approach to parenting.
Time to start on Sasquatch Jefferson Mk. 2.
I'm okay!

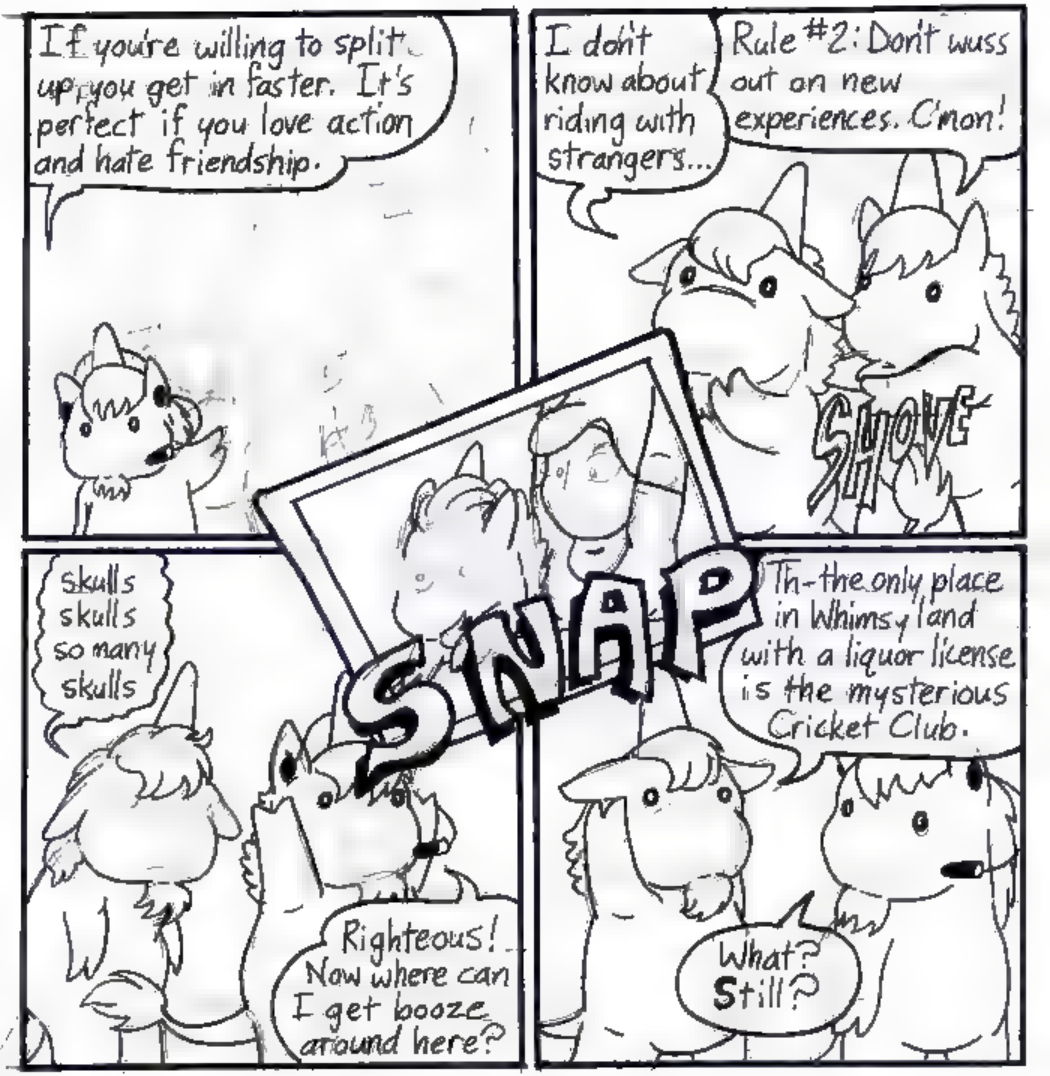

The safehouse in Jersey is still partly operational! Call this number.
Dag.
Pipsqueak robots of insufficient funkiness.. I can't get my mojo to full capacity
You had me in a mojo funk for a while there.
Yeah? How'd you fix yours up?
Licked crawfish bisque off a group of phys-ed majors in New Orleans.
Pfft. Gimme something I haven't tried.
You have to get the bisque from a place called Rocky's.

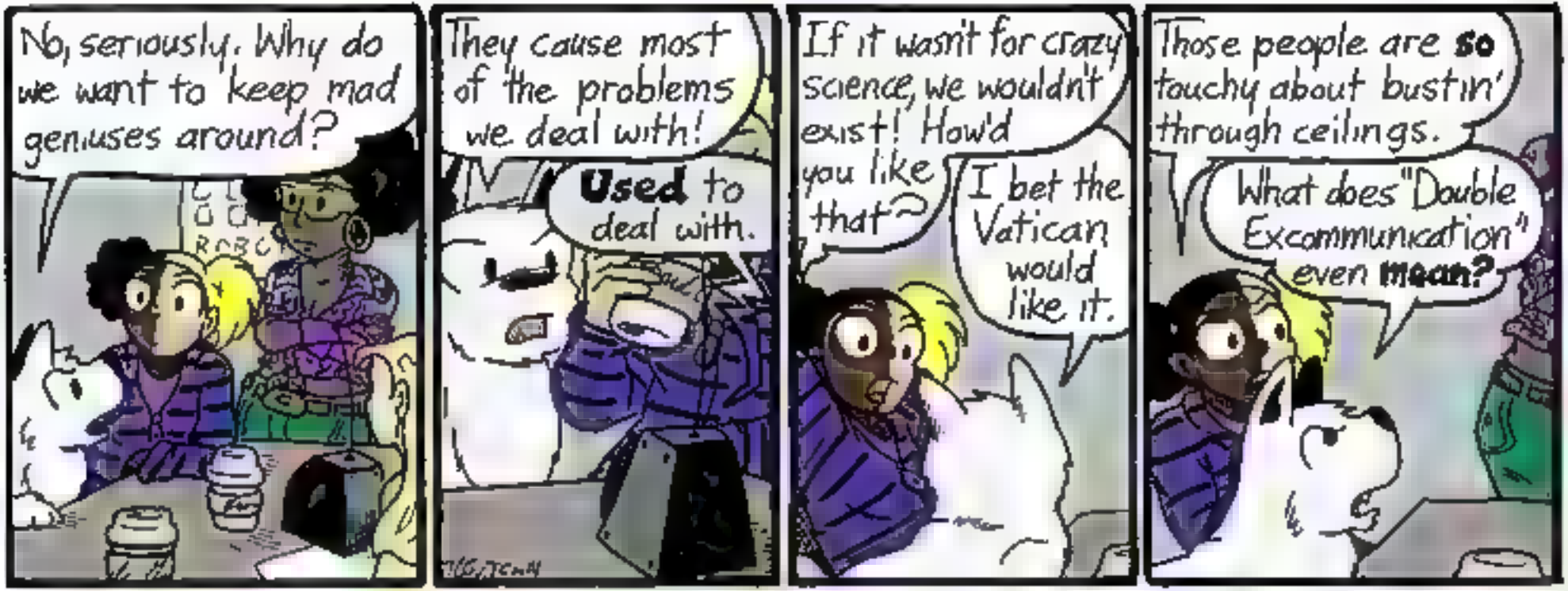

If I can't jump-start my mojo, I might as well be on the Cure.
"The Cure"?
That's what I came to tell you about.
C'mon, let's book.
I'm not going on the lam again.
We just need a spot for a confab. Safe and far from the Man's prying eyes.
I know the place.
I need to brush up on my English-to-honky skills.
Oh, most of those tripwires are just for show.
SURVEILLAN
CAMERAS O
ROPERTY
OF U.S.
VERNMENT
DANGE


Master Tip! And Dr. Jones!
Fine metal man! Slap me some hull!
The taco is going on down there?
Peace. I fix to reveal all.
Fire up your spotlight sky-signal and summon your bloods to this cubby!
Um, I called Sweetheart.
If you don't have a spotlight sky-signal, just say so.
She's stopping for pumpkin lattés on the way.

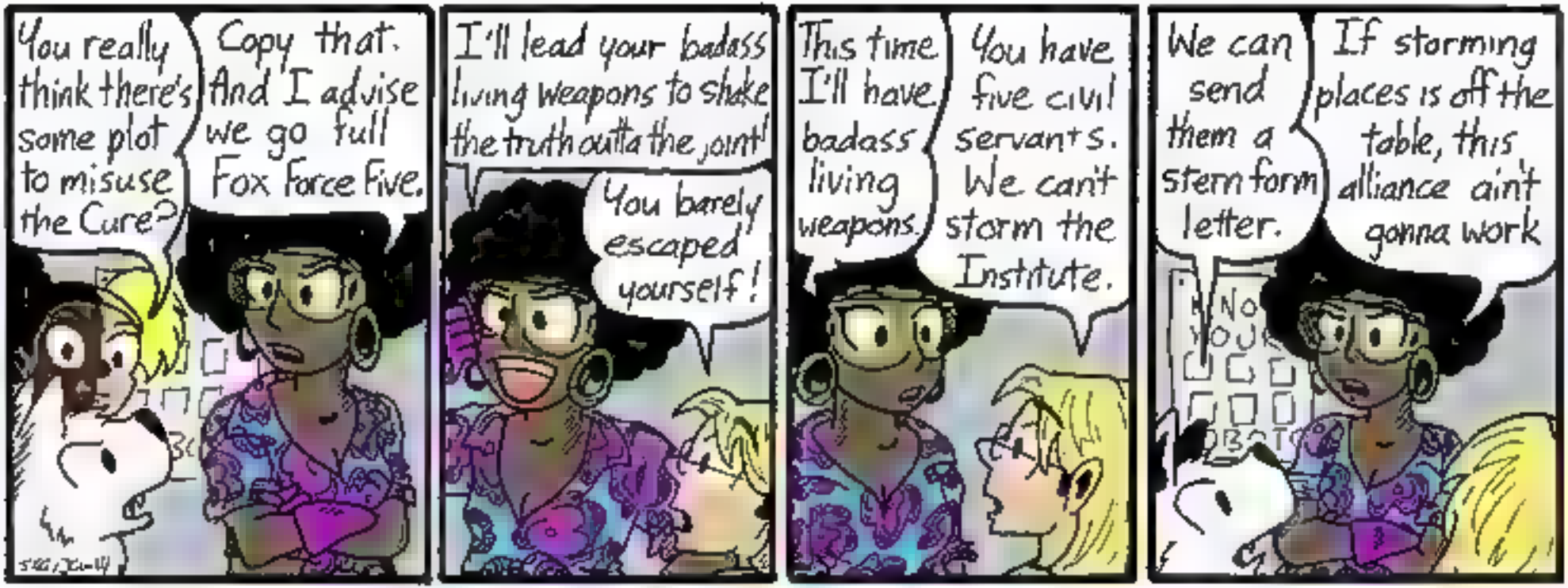

Tigerlily Jones. Perfect. I was in the mood for a little felony aiding and abetting.
service
Babe's just crabby 'cause we're missing "General Hospital."
I picked up dire intel at the Institute.
The Man's cooking a drug that'll make people like me...
normal.
Sounds good. Sign me up.
Knew I shoulda gone to the FDA first.
See if we can get a bulk discount!

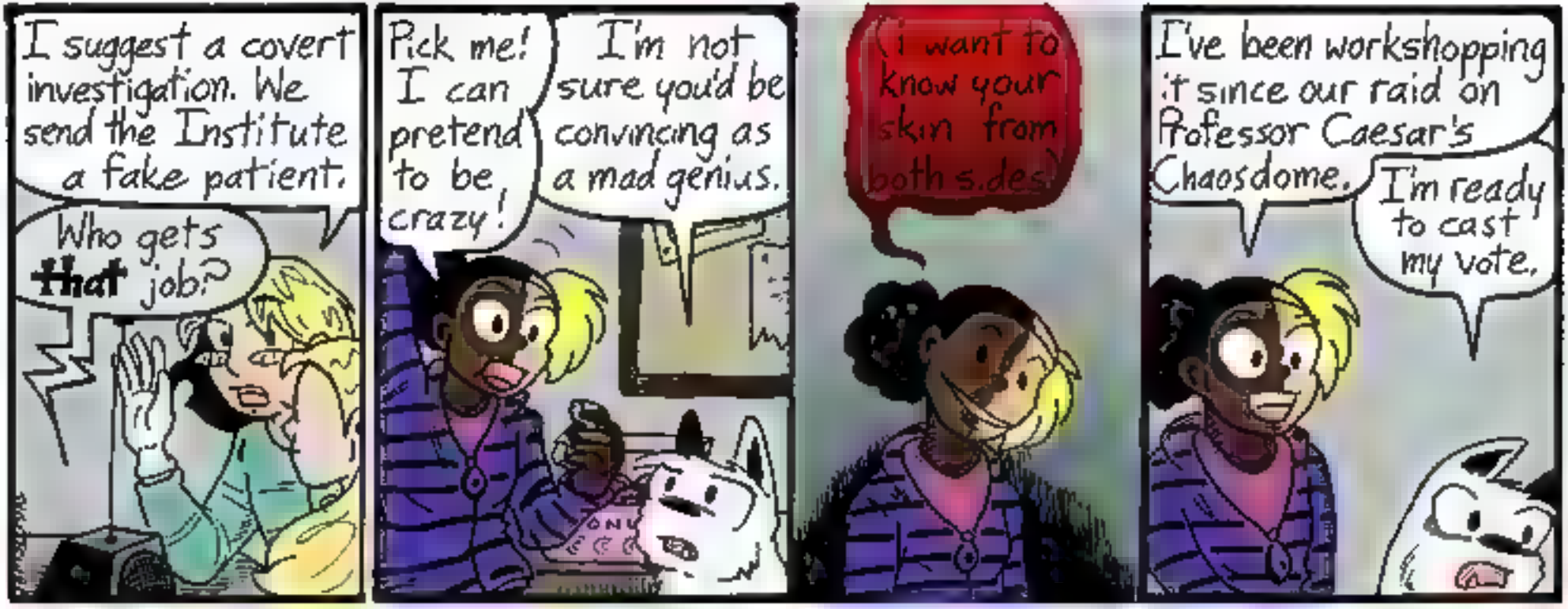

Word's gone around the scene for years there's a cure for mad genius.
Developed by the Institute?
Nah, by one of us. Till now only mads have had it, and it's only been put to chill uses.
Such as?
Loading it in cannons and shooting it at each other, mostly.
I approve of that use.
If it weren't for each other we'd have conquered the world by now.

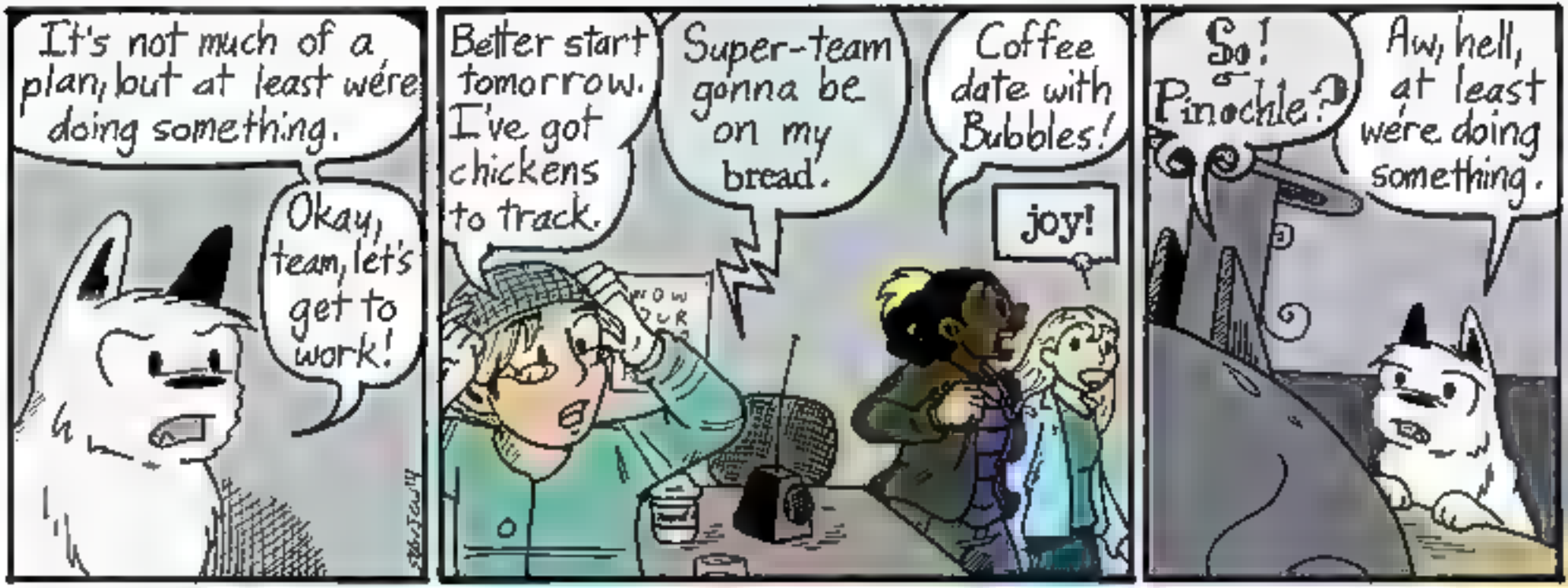

If you're willing to split up, you get in faster. It's perfect if you love action and hate friendship.
I don't know about riding with strangers...
Rule #2: Don't wuss out on new experiences. C'mon!
SHOVE
SNAP
skulls skulls so many skulls
Righteous! Now where can I get booze around here?
Th-the only place in Whimsyland with a liquor license is the mysterious Cricket Club.
What? Still?

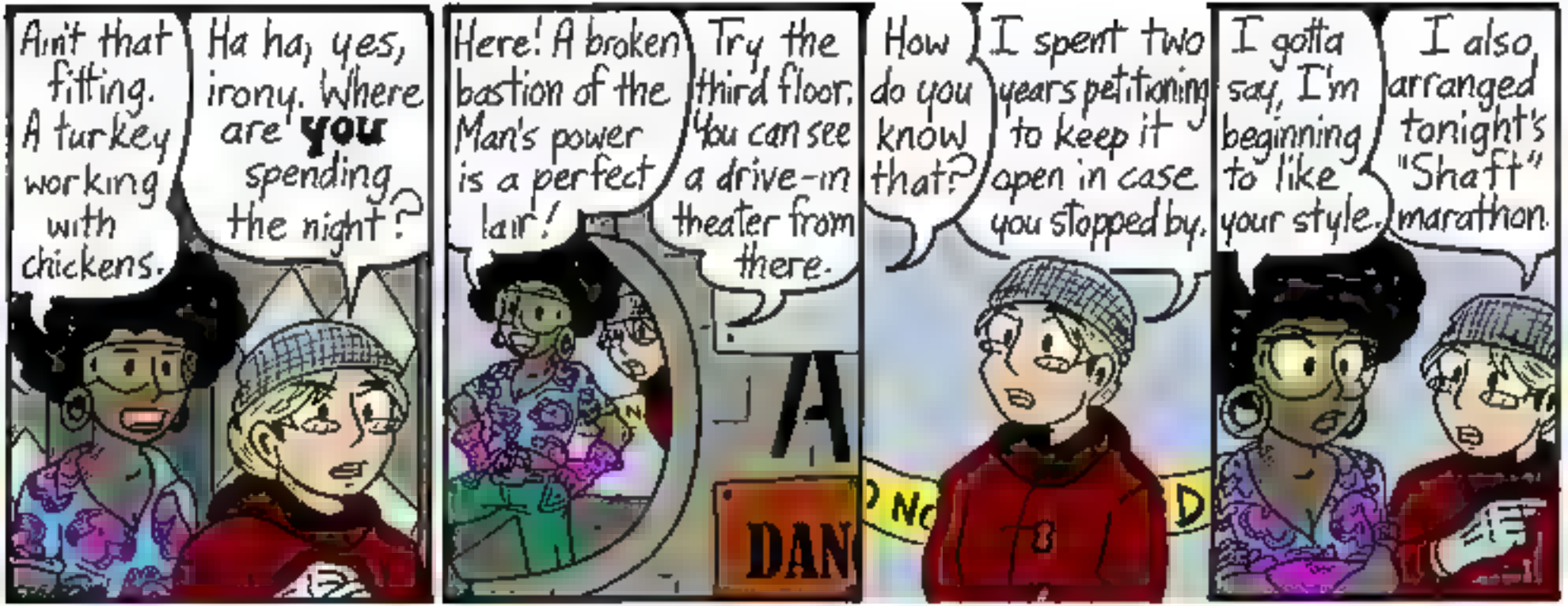

No, seriously. Why do we want to keep mad geniuses around?
They cause most of the problems we deal with!
Used to deal with.
If it wasn't for crazy science, we wouldn't exist! How'd you like that?
I bet the Vatican would like it.
Those people are so touchy about bustin' through ceilings.
What does "Double Excommunication" even mean?

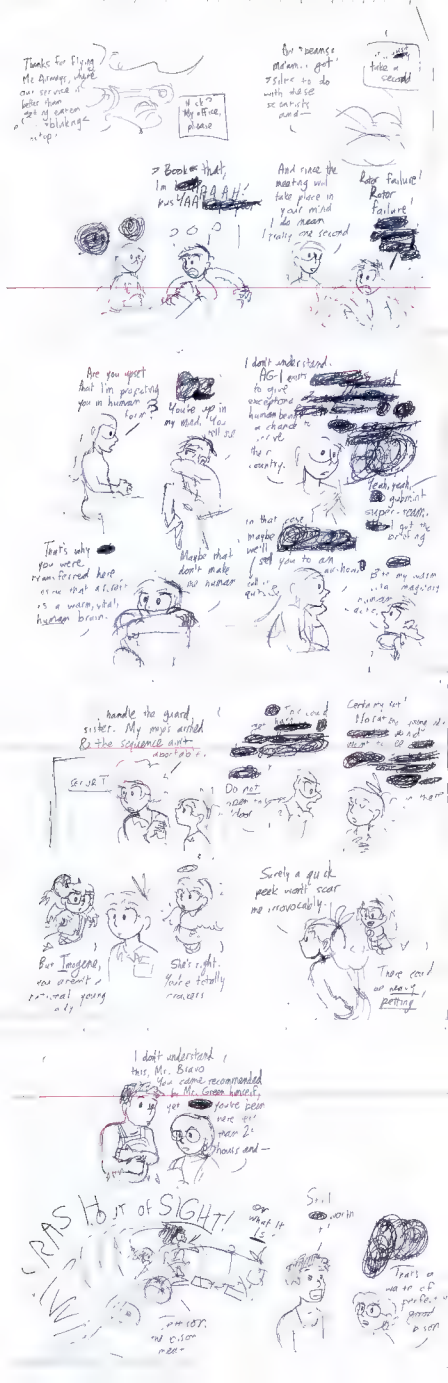

Thinking at normal speeds hurts my head. The Cure amps up reality blindness, you dig?
So?
So what if it ain't just used on the mad? You think you pretty things can fight for your rights if no human can **see** you?
What?
For real?
That's barefoot.
service is my only joy
Somebody gets it!
Well put as always, Bubbles.


You really think there's some plot to misuse the Cure?
Copy that. And I advise we go full Fox Force Five.
I'll lead your badass living weapons to shake the truth outta the joint!
You barely escaped yourself!
This time I'll have badass living weapons.
You have five civil servants. We can't storm the Institute.
We can send them a stern form letter.
If storming places is off the table, this alliance ain't gonna work


I suggest a covert investigation. We send the Institute a fake patient.
Who gets that job?
Pick me! I can pretend to be crazy!
I'm not sure you'd be convincing as a mad genius.
(I want to know your skin from both sides)
I've been workshopping it since our raid on Professor Caesar's Chaosdome.
I'm ready to cast my vote.


It's not much of a plan, but at least we're doing something.
Okay, team, let's get to work!
Better start tomorrow. I've got chickens to track.
Super-team gonna be on my bread.
Coffee date with Bubbles!
joy!
So! Pinochle?
Aw, hell, at least we're doing something.


Ain't that fitting. A turkey working with chickens.
Ha ha, yes, irony. Where are **you** spending the night?
Here! A broken bastion of the Man's power is a perfect lair!
Try the third floor. You can see a drive-in theater from there.
A
DAN
How do you know that?
I spent two years petitioning to keep it open in case you stopped by.
D
I gotta say, I'm beginning to like your style.
I also arranged tonight's "Shaft" marathon.

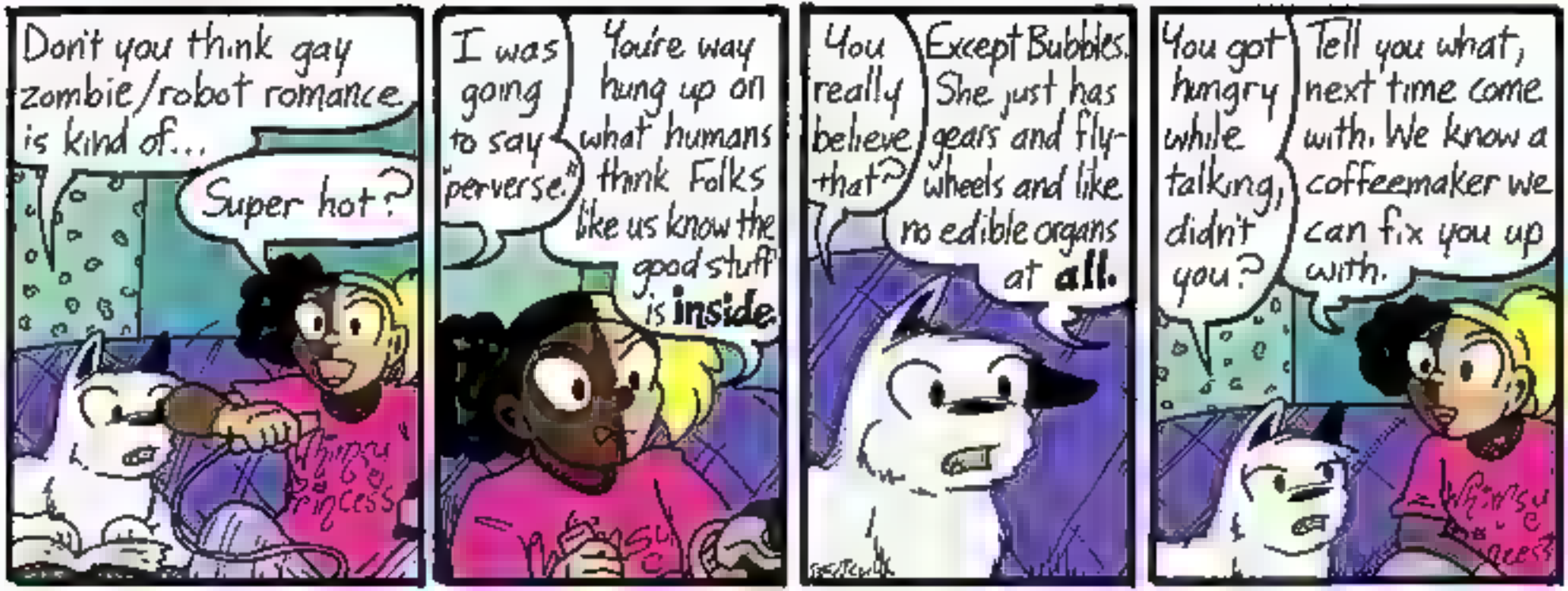

Thanks for flying Mr. Bravo, where our service is better than any of our competitors by a wide margin.
Wait, my office, please
Book me that, I'm RUN AAAAH!
And since the meeting will take place in your mind I do mean literally one second
Rotor failure! Rotor failure!
Are you upset that I'm projecting you in human form?
You're up in my head. You will not
I don't understand. AG-1 seems to give everyone human brains a chance to survive their eccentricity.
Yeah, yeah, gimmick super-robot, get the orbital ag
That's why you were transferred here once that AI lost its warm, vital, human brain.
Maybe that don't make no manner
In that case, maybe we'll need you to run some numbers
Give my users a magnificent human experience
handle the guard, sister. My wings aimed @ the sequence button.
GRUNT
Do not open the door
Tar, you're so hard
Carla my girl, Motor Pool, young Mr. Bravo, we need to go
But Imogene, you aren't normal young ones
She's right. You're totally normal
Surely a quick peek won't scar me irrevocably
There can't be any getting
I don't understand this, Mr. Bravo. You came recommended by Mr. Gordon himself, yet you've been here over 2 hours and—
GRASHOT of SIGHT!
Oh, what it is!
Still worth it
That's one of the prettiest, most graceful deaths


Shazam! Take that, security cameras!
I, er, got you takeout.
CRASH
Chitlin, pork belly... we didn't get soul food on the inside
I thought it might be your thing.
You wouldn't be trawling for another kiss, little man?
Well. Erm.
koff
I only got room for one helping of pig lips, and they're in these beans.
I said I wasn't a "narc"!

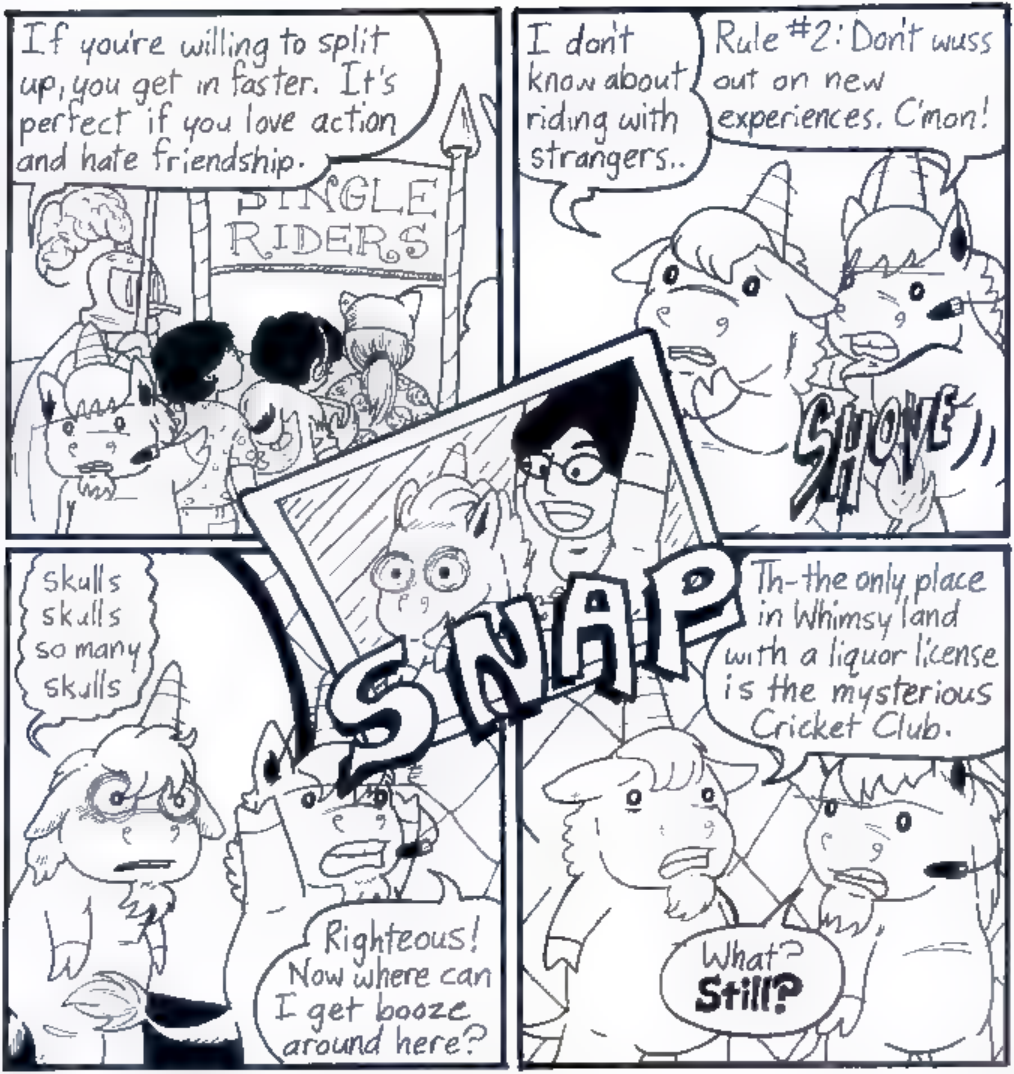

I hope I'm not feeding your blaxploitation pathology.
Mm. Want to know a secret, Melba toast?
You think I'm crazy 'cause I don't know I'm not an Egyptian queen reincarnated on the planet Lovetron.
But I do know.
I'm crazy 'cause I don't care.
What the hell. Pass the ribs.
The Lovetron army welcomes you, recruit.


Maybe I can help break your Institute conditioning.
How?
How else? Puppets!
Yeah, I'm the one with the pathology.
"Yo," "dawg"! I've been altered by operant conditioning!
Ha! You're pretty cute, foxy yarn sister!
The puppets talk to each other, not you.
I'll name you "Sweet Honey Puddinspoon."


Man, you'll never guess what Bubbles said tonight. It was hilarious!
"Service is my only joy"?
It was the **way** she said it.
You two are hitting it off, eh?
You oughta see her lately. She's so.. **real.** Like she's finally who she's supposed to be.
And I like when she forgets she's not a water cooler and pees on people.
I get neck strain keeping up with your matur.ity level.


Don't you think gay zombie/robot romance is kind of...
Super hot?
I was going to say "perverse."
You're way hung up on what humans think. Folks like us know the good stuff is inside.
You really believe that?
Except Bubbles. She just has gears and fly-wheels and like no edible organs at all.
You got hungry while talking, didn't you?
Tell you what, next time come with. We know a coffeemaker we can fix you up with.

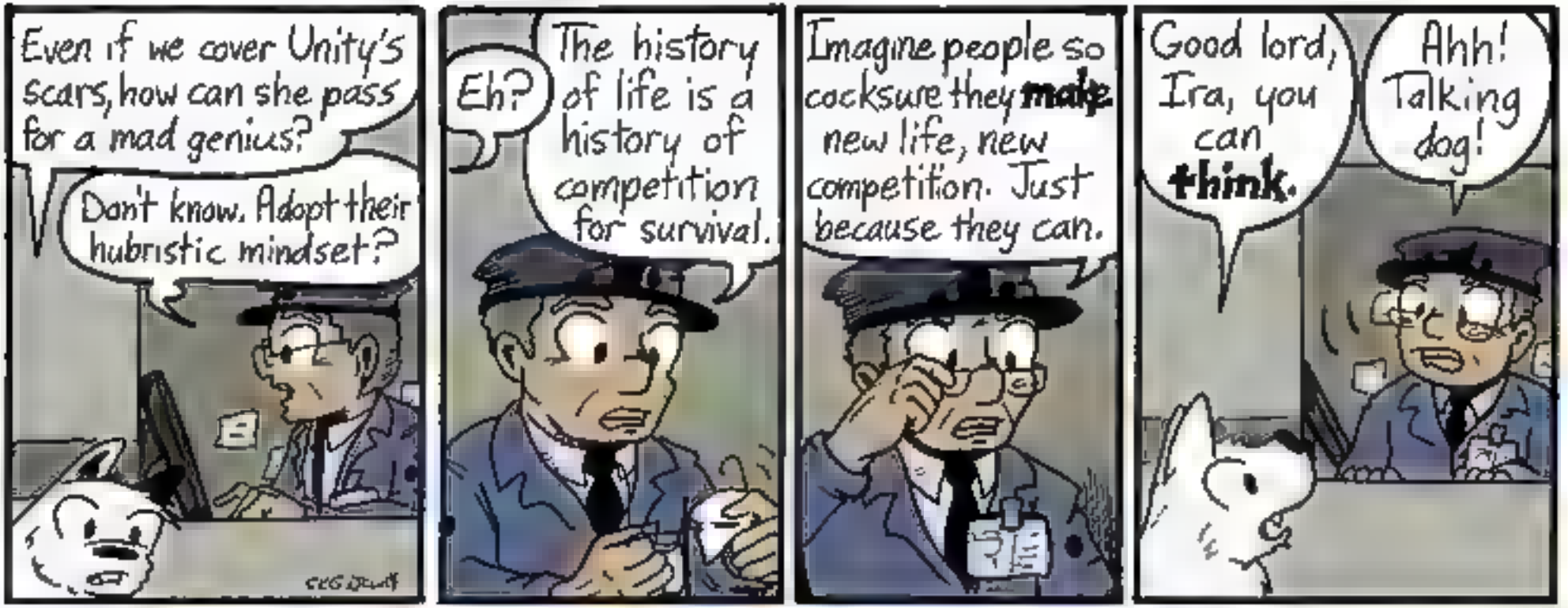

You sure you want to go undercover to the Institute?
A sweet fact-finding mission like that? Sure!
Whimsy Princess
I don't know how we'll disguise you...
Oh, there's no way. They'll totes figure out I'm an undead bioweapon.
What?! And what then?
Around then is usually when the rending starts.
Whimsy
Exactly what facts do you expect will be found?
The Institute is gonna learn **lots.**
Whimsy Princess


If you're willing to split up, you get in faster. It's perfect if you love action and hate friendship.
SINGLE RIDERS
I don't know about riding with strangers..
Rule #2: Don't wuss out on new experiences. C'mon!
SHOVE
SNAP
Skulls skulls so many skulls
Righteous! Now where can I get booze around here?
Th-the only place in Whimsy land with a liquor license is the mysterious Cricket Club.
What? Still?

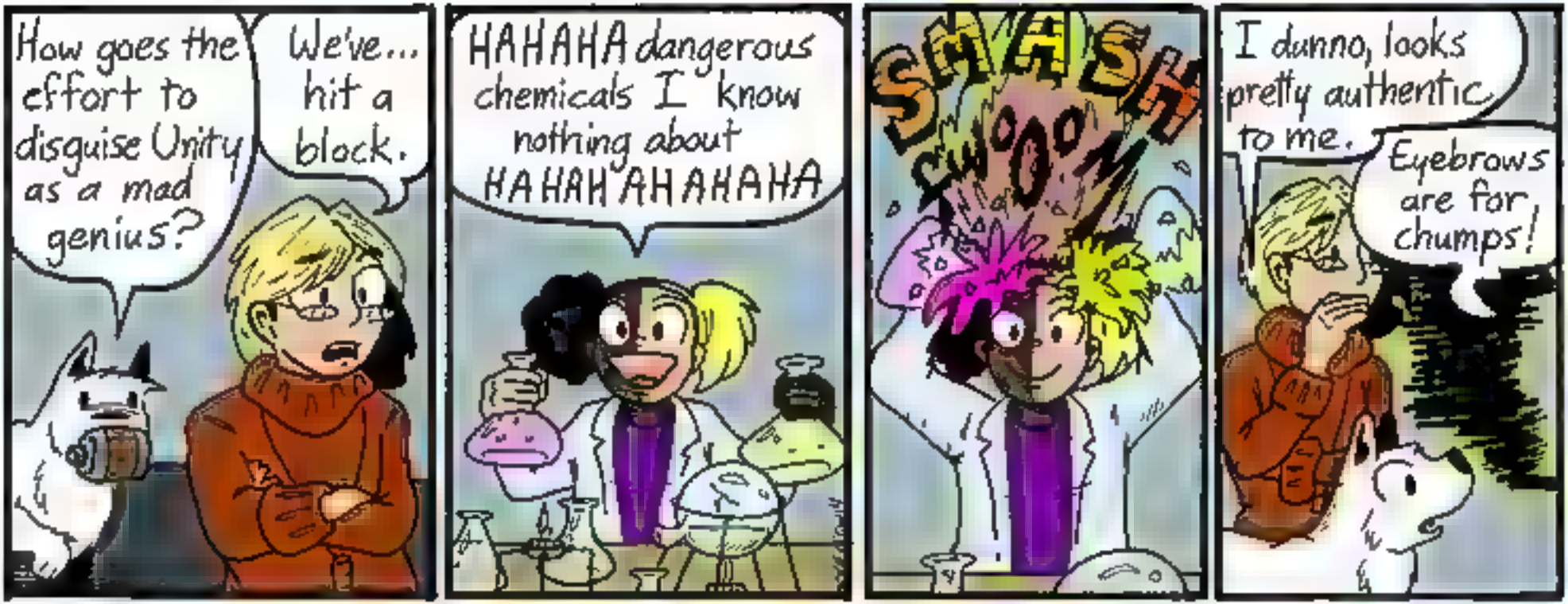

Maybe I'm just being overprotective again. Should I relax and let Unity go on this ridiculous mission?
But I'm really concerned about her maintaining her cover at the Institute.
Anyway, I need an impartial opinion. What's your first thought?
Ahh! Talking dog!
Okay, that's a start. We'll take this slow.

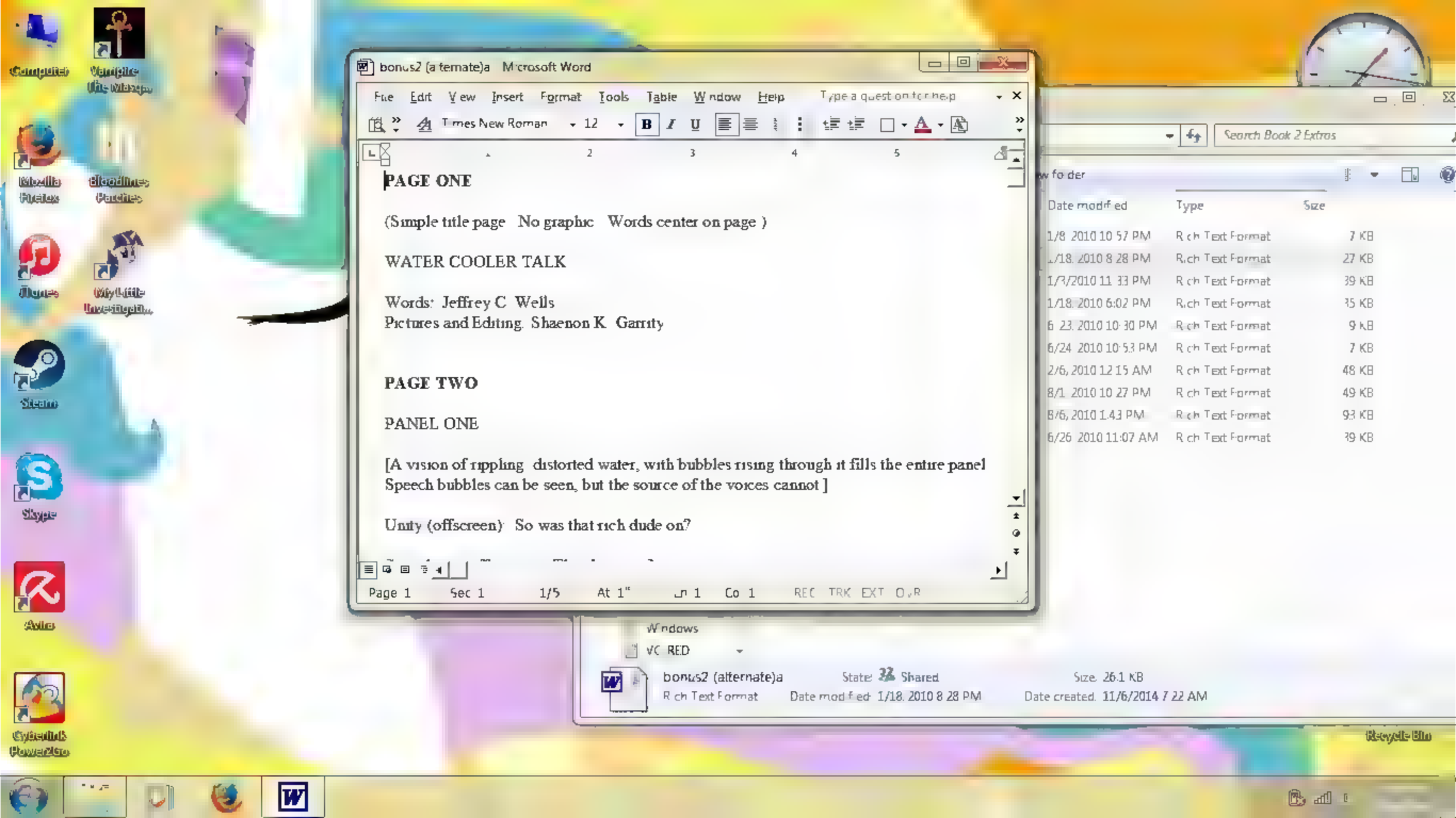

Honestly, Ira, I just vent to you because you won't remember a thing
What do you mean? I have a perfect memory!
Oh really?
I still recall sitting on my Zadie's knee when I was so high.
Then there's a slight gap between 1989 and . oh . about ten minutes ago.
The world must be an interesting place for you.
That horrible Madonna woman isn't still around, is she?

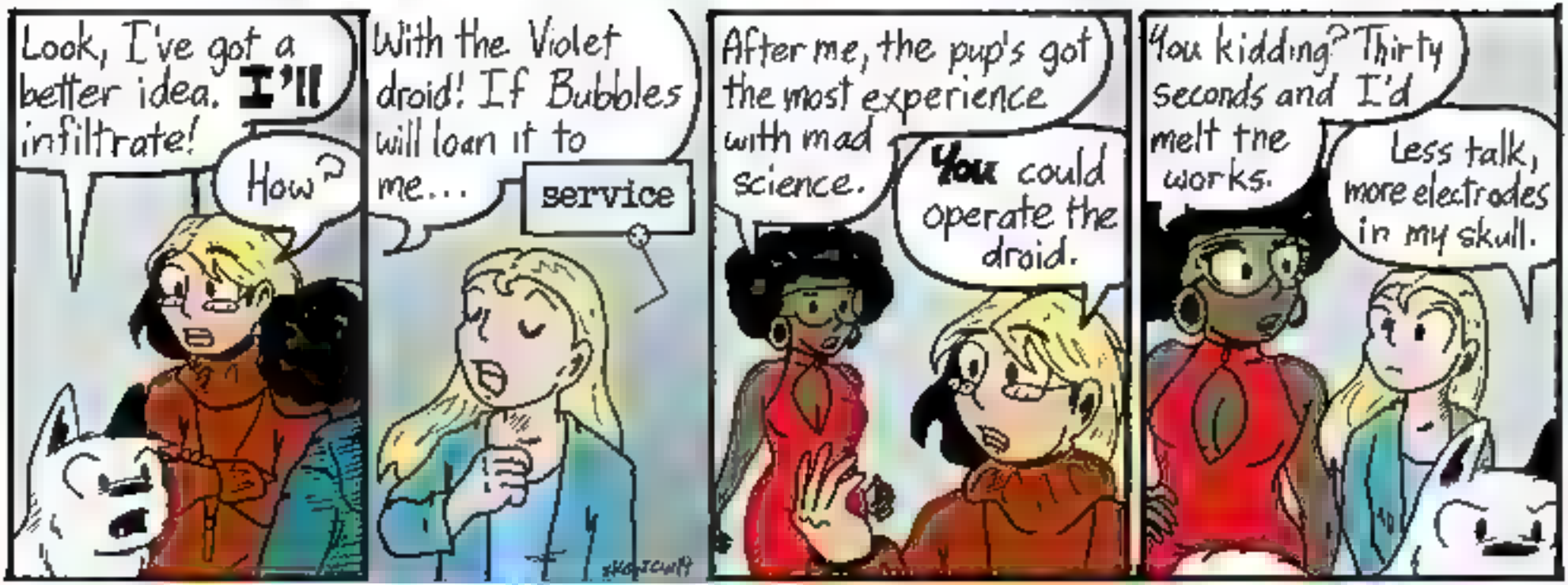

I just need a sounding board, Ira. I don't expect you to help.
You think I can't help you, miss?
I'm sorry, that was rude. You have advice about Unity?
No.
But I'm pretty sure this contains alcohol.
Fangs, Ira.
Glad to serve!


Even if we cover Unity's scars, how can she pass for a mad genius?
Don't know. Adopt their hubristic mindset?
Eh?
The history of life is a history of competition for survival.
Imagine people so cocksure they make new life, new competition. Just because they can.
Good lord, Ira, you can think.
Ahh! Talking dog!


If you're worried about your friend, why not go in her place?
As you helpfully keep pointing out, talking dog.
Oh, yes. Shame you don't have, I don't know, some kind of human suit.
Yeah, that'd solve a whole lot of—
Oh!
Ira, I'm so glad you don't realize the building's condemned and you don't have to come in.
The what is what now?

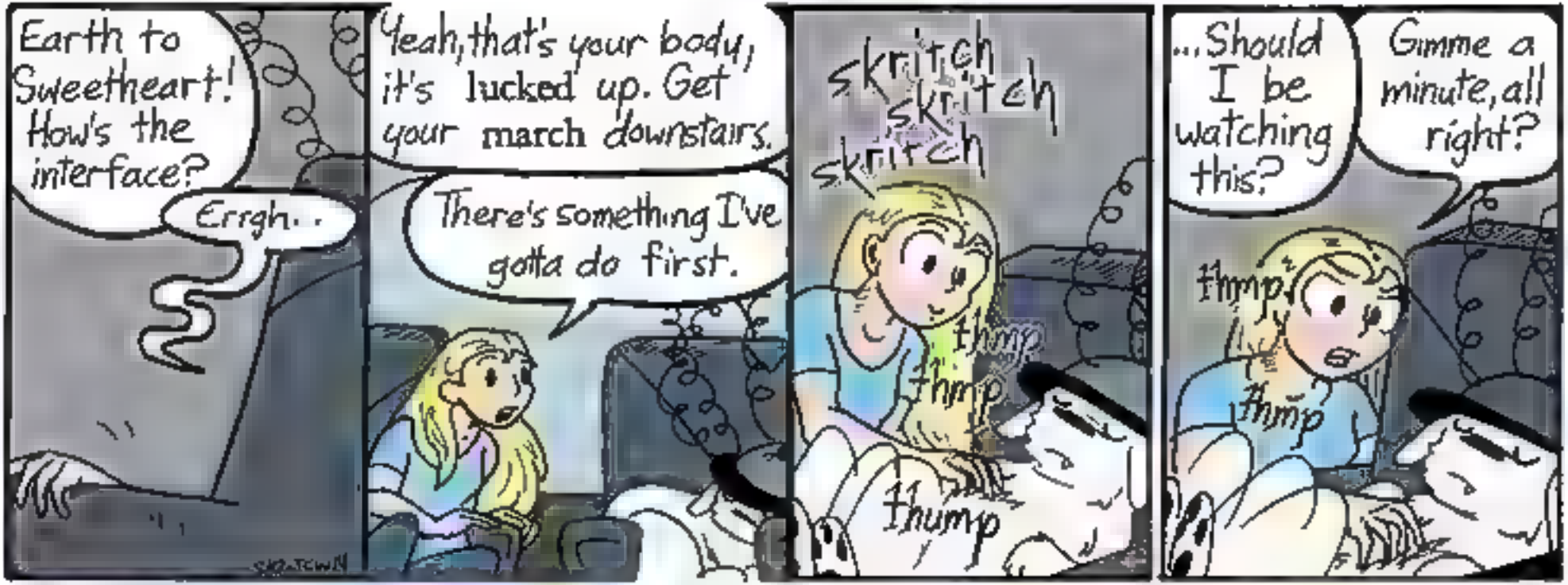

How goes the effort to disguise Unity as a mad genius?
We've... hit a block.
HAHAHA dangerous chemicals I know nothing about HAHAHAHAHAHA
SHASH
SWOOM
I dunno, looks pretty authentic to me.
Eyebrows are for chumps!


bonus2 (alternate)a Microsoft Word
File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Window Help
Times New Roman 12
PAGE ONE
(Simple title page No graphic Words center on page)
WATER COOLER TALK
Words: Jeffrey C Wells
Pictures and Editing. Shaenon K Garrity
PAGE TWO
PANEL ONE
[A vision of rippling distorted water, with bubbles rising through it fills the entire panel
Speech bubbles can be seen, but the source of the voices cannot]
Unity (offscreen) So was that rich dude on?
Page 1 Sec 1 1/5 At 1" 1 Co 1 REC TRK EXT OVR
Search Book 2 Extras
Date modified Type Size
1/8/2010 10:57 PM Rich Text Format 7 KB
1/18/2010 8:28 PM Rich Text Format 27 KB
1/3/2010 11:33 PM Rich Text Format 39 KB
1/18/2010 6:02 PM Rich Text Format 35 KB
6/23/2010 10:30 PM Rich Text Format 9 KB
6/24/2010 10:53 PM Rich Text Format 7 KB
2/6/2010 12:15 AM Rich Text Format 48 KB
8/1/2010 10:27 PM Rich Text Format 49 KB
8/6/2010 1:43 PM Rich Text Format 93 KB
6/26/2010 11:07 AM Rich Text Format 39 KB
bonus2 (alternate)a
Rich Text Format
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Recycle Bin

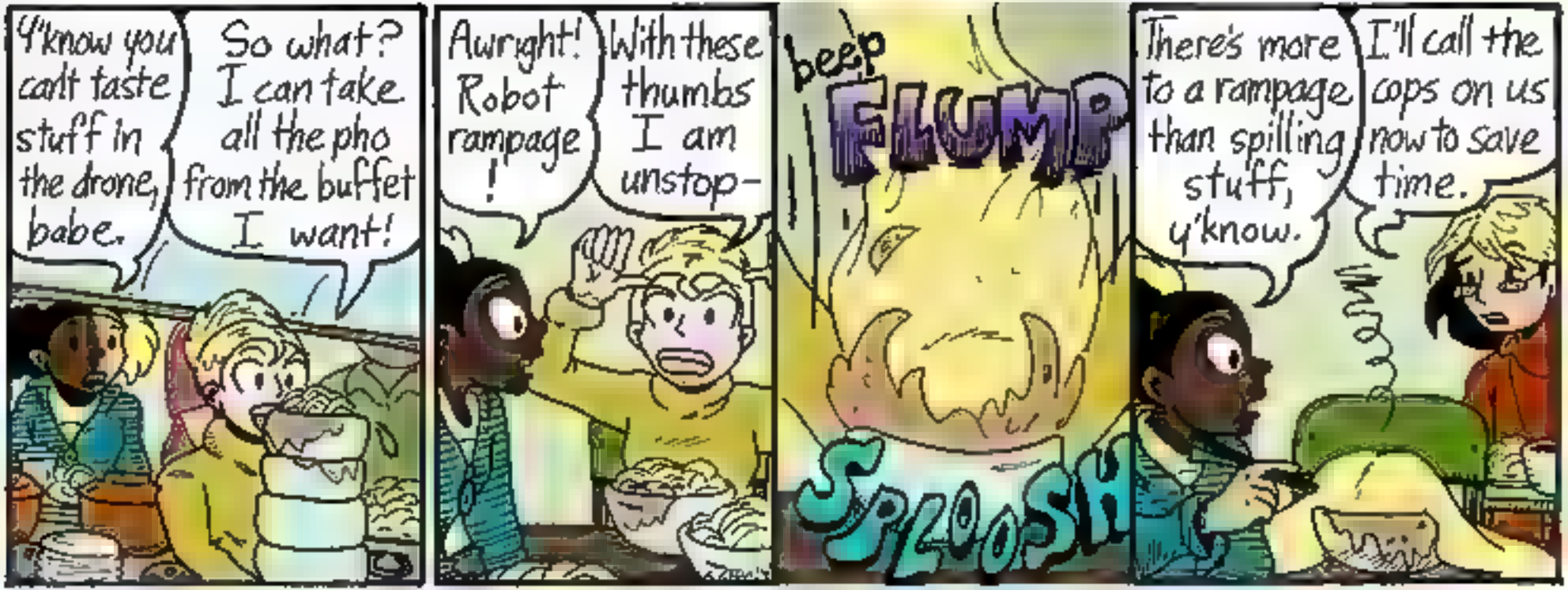

Look, I've got a better idea. I'll infiltrate!
How?
With the Violet droid! If Bubbles will loan it to me...
service
After me, the pup's got the most experience with mad science.
You could operate the droid.
You kidding? Thirty seconds and I'd melt the works.
Less talk, more electrodes in my skull.


Thanks for lending Sweetheart your body and stuff...
service is my only joy
Don't worry, we can still have coffee dates. See?
joy?
SPLOSH
Tip! Biscotti us!
sErViCe iS mY oNlY jOy


Where'd we get a neural interface hat, again?
Your munty ghoulfriend designed it one time she was high on brains.
Oh yeah. Smart Unity.
Hey, why didn't we send her?
Unity on brains makes me uncomfortable. She messes up our roomie vibe.
More uncomfortable than zapping your own freezing brain?
You've obviously never had a roomie vibe.

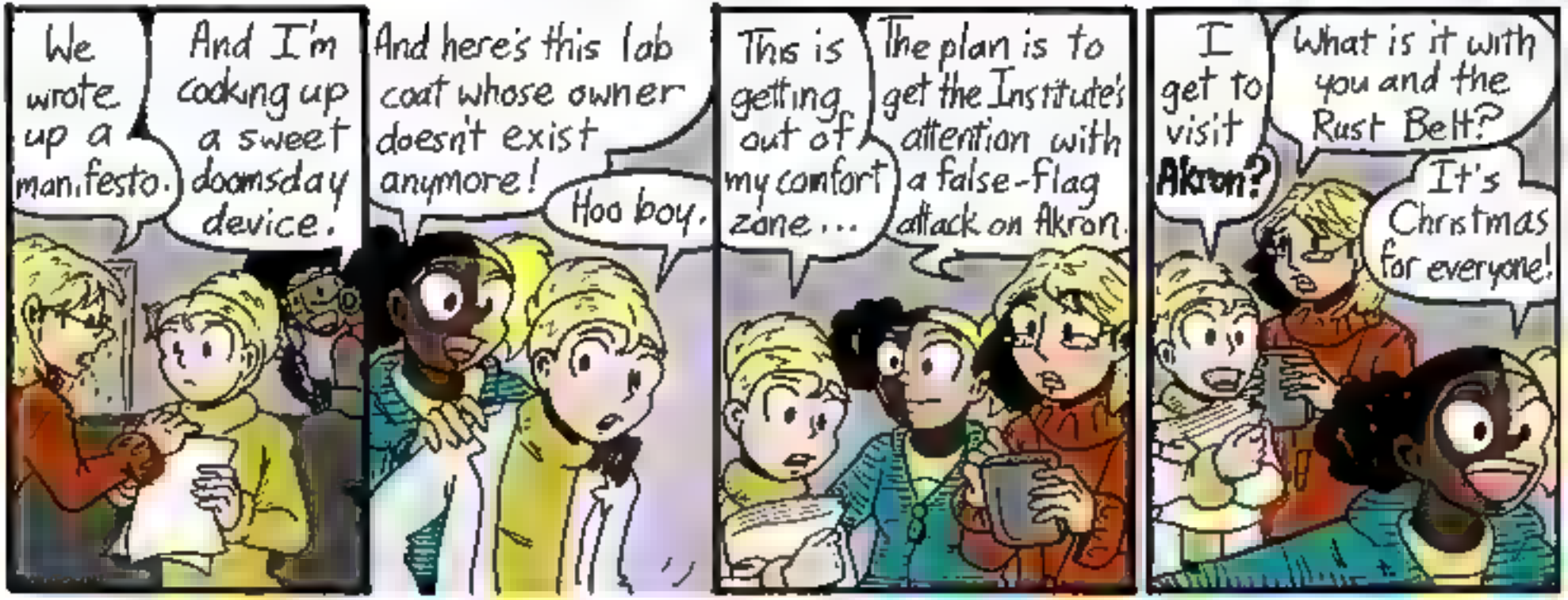

Earth to Sweetheart! How's the interface?
Errgh..
Yeah, that's your body, it's lucked up. Get your march downstairs.
There's something I've gotta do first.
skritch skritch skritch
thump thump thump
...Should I be watching this?
Gimme a minute, all right?
thump thump

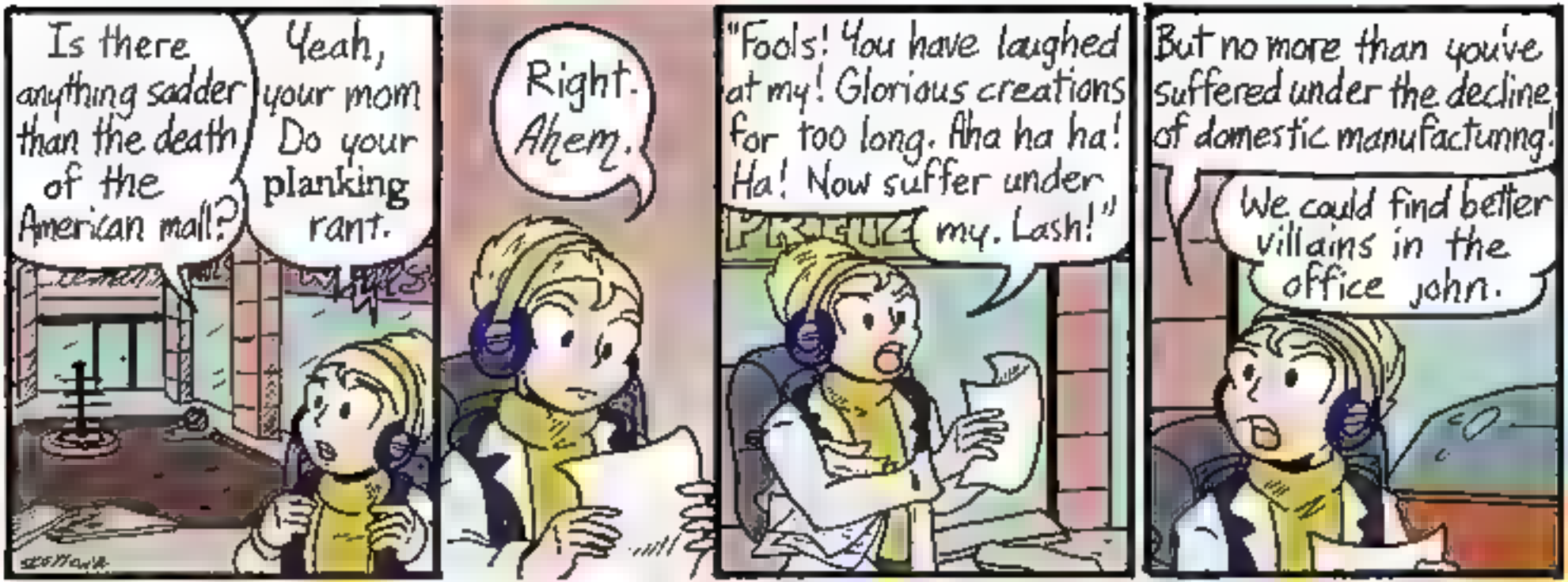

tmp tmp tmp
erk
erk
erk
BWAHAHAHAHA
Er .. hello, Sweetheart.
I AM IMMCIBLE.

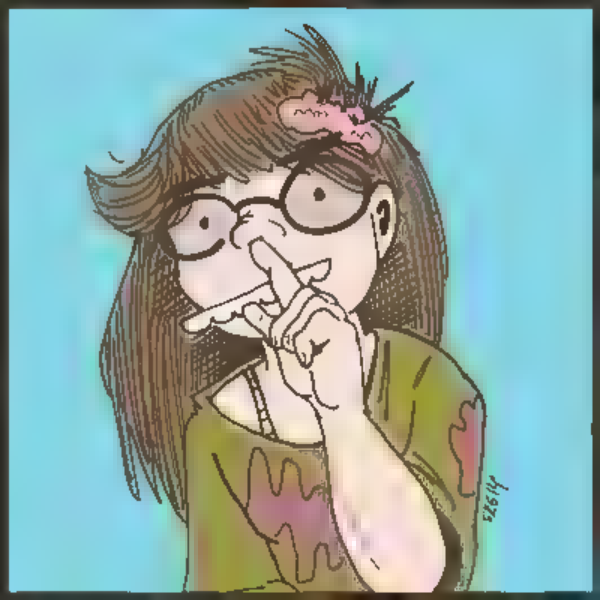

Y'know you can't taste stuff in the drone, babe.
So what? I can take all the pho from the buffet I want!
Awright! Robot rampage!
With these thumbs I am unstop-
beep
FLUMP
SPLOOSH
There's more to a rampage than spilling stuff, y'know.
I'll call the cops on us now to save time.


Violet operated by Nick
For fuck's sake it's just a waldo.
Violet operated by Sweetheart


Yaah! What the what the what?
Welcome to drone dump-shock, potboiler.
Eh?
Jacking in takes it outta you. You stayed online pretty long, FWIW.
But you were in Violet for days.
That's cuz I'm punking awesome at keeping it up.
Hey, that's what she-
You people are pathetic.


We wrote up a manifesto.
And I'm cooking up a sweet doomsday device.
And here's this lab coat whose owner doesn't exist anymore!
Hoo boy.
This is getting out of my comfort zone...
The plan is to get the Institute's attention with a false-flag attack on Akron.
I get to visit Akron?
What is it with you and the Rust Belt?
It's Christmas for everyone!


Is there anything sadder than the death of the American mall?
Yeah, your mom Do your planking rant.
Right. Ahem.
"Fools! You have laughed at my! Glorious creations for too long. Aha ha ha! Ha! Now suffer under my. Lash!"
But no more than you've suffered under the decline of domestic manufacturing!
We could find better villains in the office john.



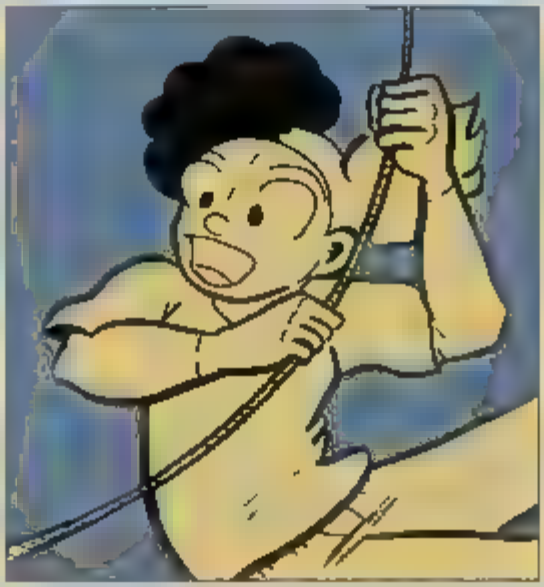

not

Clan Horse

Book Two: Tigerlily Jones



Book Three:
Path of the Notary




Zombie Rights Now!
BLACK OPS SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE


WE MUST *TEACH* HIM, MAX! HEY, WHERE DO YOU *KEEP* THAT GUN?
NONE OF YOUR DAMN BUSINESS, SAM.
SHALL WE DANCE?
LET'S!



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